

THE SPECKLED DOMES

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Frontispiece.

THE AUTHOR.

THE SPECKLED DOMES

Episodes of an Englishman's
Life in Russia

By GERARD SHELLEY



DUCKWORTH

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THE SPECKLED DOMES

CHAPTER I

THE FORESHADOWING

HAD anyone suggested that the bulbous-looking woman, sporting like a mermaid in the blue waters of the Adriatic on the Lido of Venice that hot summer afternoon, was destined to open the most romantic chapter of my life, I should have taken him for a Cubist jester. That was in 1907. I was very young then, a stripling of fifteen, just down for a holiday by the sea after hard labour in an Italian college near Lake Garda.

The venerable father, who was my mentor and companion, had vague nebulous ideas about the sea and its dwellers. I feel quite sure the sight of the sporting lady filled him with pious thoughts of Jonah and the whale. He gave one rapid look at her with his dark little eyes and chose a spot to sit down.

He drew out his oily Breviary and started to mutter his office to the lapping waves and the clear blue, dazzling sky, leaving me to enjoy myself by throwing stones at a rock which jutted out of the sea.

That little rock was doomed to play an astounding rôle in shaping the course of my life. Few people who see it to-day would guess that it was, figuratively, my jumping-off board into the mysterious land of Russia.

Fate lurked somehow in or about it on that hot and careless summer day like a nautical Jack-in-the-Box, ready to spring out at the slightest touch. It happened with frightful suddenness.

I had made more than a dozen vain attempts to hit the rock and was beginning to grow weary of the sport. The

rock was behaving in a tantalising manner, just as one would have it behave for the fun of the thing. The waves kept sweeping over it in rhythmic succession, so that it seemed like the hard black head of a little negro, with just a little dunnish seaweed clinging like curls round the nob. As if with a studied challenge it kept popping out of the water and thrusting its smooth shining pate at me in cunning defiance. I took aim and sent my stone whizzing swift and sure towards it, only to see the artful dodger slip from sight beneath the waves.

So at last I decided to change my tactics. I counted the seconds the waves took to come and go and timed the distance between each swell and dip. I rose up and down on the tips of my toes as though I was on a ship. Drawing a deep breath, I let go.

Then the trouble began. My faithful stone flew as straight as an arrow to the grinning rock and struck it full on the nob. I gave a gasp of delight. But alas! Youth is the season of laughter and tears. Rapid succession in events and fateful surprises are part of its experience. My victorious stone was a most immoral one. Of course, I was totally unaware of that when I picked it up casually from the beach. But as the Lido is not exactly a nursery of the cardinal virtues, I suppose it must have been in touch with some very unhallowed person. In any case it was more than the stone of stumbling; it was a petrified iniquity. No sooner did it strike the rock than it made off in a bee-line in the twinkling of an eye and smote with a resounding thud the thinly-clad form of the diving lady . . .

There was a heart-rending shriek. The diving lady threw all her pleasure to the waves and strode on to the beach with glaring eyes and a shrill voice. The rest of her was clad in a dripping, clinging bathing costume of green taffeta.

I shudder to recall the sight of her advancing towards me like an infuriated mermaid in a state of unwieldy obesity. To make matters worse, a tall man with a military moustache

sprang up from the sunlit beach and added his hard, insolent voice to hers. He wore a red striped bathing suit and strode about like a petty Nero.

I could not make out to which nationality they belonged. From their animated jaws came strange guttural sounds and hissing noises alternated with rapid French words of abuse. Hearing the latter, I tried to offer them my apologies in that language, and to explain how the fateful stone had started on its career of crime without giving me the slightest warning. All was in vain. My modest voice was drowned by a roaring torrent of invective.

Perplexed and annoyed, I stood before them with open hands. What could I do in such an unfortunate situation with the strange and moving spectacle of two irate, yelling, bloodthirsty individuals in hot and cold sea-costumes respectively?

"*Un moment!*" I implored, hoping their emotions would take a rest. In vain! For me to open my mouth was enough to set the torrent rolling faster and louder than ever.

To crown my embarrassment, a small crowd began to gather. My venerable mentor was deeply distressed. With his thumb between the pages of his oily Breviary, he implored my aggressors for a reasonable enquiry into the matter. He might just as well have asked for the moon. Reason was out at sea.

I overheard someone in the crowd exclaim contemptuously: "*Eh bien! C'est une vieille histoire! Ce sont des Russes. Ils passent leur vie à engueler le monde!*"

As I afterwards learnt, he had a room next door to them, and spoke from personal experience.

From this remark I realised that my cause was hopeless. I was getting my first taste of the Russian character and my baptism into communion with the Russian "soul." The latter had always been a mystery to me ever since the college professor of literature had bored his lively pupils with a verbose enthusiasm for the genius of Dostoievsky.

Now its mystery stood revealed before me. I discovered the Russian soul was rather underdosed with reason and will-power. In fact it was gushing all over the beach like a spirit run amok.

Fortunately, however, there are exceptions to every rule, and I was soon to discover one. A charming lady, in a white plumed hat and a white costume trimmed with peasant lace, came up, and said something to my aggressors in their own strange, hissing tongue. It was a great relief to see the stormy billows sink visibly in their breasts. Under her kindly guidance the affair was soon settled. My explanation and apologies were duly accepted, the criminal stone was rightly condemned and left to the mercy of the waves, and the indignant Russians, in their wet and dry costumes respectively, returned to a spot in the sun on the blazing beach.

My charming rescuer did not depart so suddenly as she had arrived. She found my venerable mentor was good to look on and better to talk to. It was all about boys and the trouble of bringing them up. She announced herself as the Countess Torloff, and I gathered from her voluble French that she had a couple of sons whom she wished to save from the contamination of Russia. She did not wish them to return to school there, for Russian schools were what she called "*des véritables pépinières de l'anarchie.*"

From her rich, elegant attire, quite the last word in Parisian smartness, I concluded she was a woman of importance in her own country. She was very communicative, and enlarged with morbid joy on the atrocious morals and utter worthlessness of her fellow-countrymen. Having for so long borne the whole burden of sticking up for the British Empire in a crowded Italian college, I found it beyond my comprehension that one should talk of one's own country in such a devastating manner.

"But Russia's your native country!" I ventured to remark.

She laughed joyfully, shrugging her shoulders and disclosing a flashing row of the finest, whitest and smallest teeth I have ever seen.

"*Que voulez-vous ?*" she said. "*Nous Russes, nous sommes des Apaches endimanchés !* Wherever a Russian puts his foot there springs up a toadstool ! Russians are worth nothing ! "

Such self-disparagement, so sweeping and all-destroying, filled me with unsettling alarm. The Countess was herself a Russian, so charming, so elegant and agreeable. What, then, was the mysterious quality that made the Russian so worthless ? Later on, I was to discover part of the mystery. The Countess's words were just part of that strange, morbid love of Nihilism in all its forms, that pervading, disintegrating "Nichevo," which undermines gods, thrones, states and morals, yet puts up at last with the bloody tyrant's yoke.

The outcome of Countess Torloff's conversation was the decision that her two sons should be handed over to the severe rule of my mentor and taken back to his college.

For me, the arrangement was a step forward in my career. I was brought into contact with two young Russians who soon became my close friends. Many a time did they invite me to visit their beautiful home in the south of Russia and enjoy the delights of town life at their houses in Moscow and Petrograd. Being young and full of exuberant life, they were not so critical and despondent about their native country as their charming mother. She had, it is true, seen a lot to damage her faith in it during the Revolution of 1905, and expected nothing but a repetition of its horrors if the people were to break the bars of their cage once more. Her sons, however, found a due sense of national pride not altogether out of place in the midst of a crowd of hot-blooded boys, to whom national rivalries and boastings were daily food.

True, they never fell into raptures over the depth of the

temperature and the length of winter in Russia, nor were they prepared to maintain with their fists the superiority of vodka over Chartreuse, but they constantly asserted their love for something the West had not.

“ Akh ! ” they would say, sweeping the marvels of Italian architecture into oblivion with a contemptuous gesture of their elegant hands. “ St. Peter’s, St. Mark’s, and the Duomo at Milan ! All that’s Nichevo ! You should see our speckled domes ! They are the joy of the eyes. Russia laughs all her length and breadth with her speckled domes ! ”

From a rock in the Adriatic to those wonderful creations was a long jump. Needless to say, I did not take it all at once. It was not until 1913 that I was destined to get a glimpse of them and make my bow to the strange people dwelling within their dancing shadows.

CHAPTER II

FIRST GLIMPSES

I

At twenty-one, a young man is ready to breast a good deal. With that adventurous age coursing through my veins, I set out for Russia. In my pocket was an invitation from Countess Torloff and her sons to visit their estate in the Government of Kursk. From the terms of the letter I gathered my cup of pleasure was to be well filled. Russia appeared to be a Garden of Eden. In those Elysian fields no mention was made of the dark sinister figures which Europe was accustomed to read of as gliding silent and death-armed among the fragrant bushes of Holy Russia and dropping an occasional bomb on Grand Dukes for the glorification of Anarchy and the confusion of despots.

I had almost come to believe they were fictions of the Jingo press, ever ready to sing a pious hallelujah over the death of a Holy Russian. Two English-speaking gentlemen had had a share in moulding my views of the land of the Tsars. To Mr. Stephen Graham, I owed the belief that it was the mystic closed garden where God walked abroad in gracious intimacy. It was the land of Mary at the feet of Christ, where the high contemplation of lofty truths put the Western Mammon-serving Marthas to shame. I confess I was attracted by Mr. Graham's writings. They had a ring of sincerity which echoed in my affections.

On the other hand, I looked forward to large splashes of blood, heart-rending cries of despair and the very goriest of persecutions of a most virtuous and neighbourly tribe.

This impression was due to the writings of Mr. Israel Zangwill. I must own I made due allowance for the writer's temperament. A little overdressing, a large display of *glitter and vivid colours*, a lyrical and atavistic tendency to communal wailing, are well-known features of the Oriental soul. I was obliged to find the middle path between the two writers.

When I found myself in the midst of a horde of clamorous officials all seething for my passport or my blood I realised I was in Russia. It was my misfortune not to be able to divide myself into three portions. If I had been so I should have saved myself a world of trouble. I was wanted by the passport officials ; I was wanted at the same time by the custom officials ; and I was wanted by the porter, who had secured me a dinner, a place in the train, and some Russian money. My passport and luggage were variously distributed, I was jostled to and fro on a stream of evil-smelling, shouting, weeping, cursing passengers, porters, beggars, loafers, officials, and soldiers, while all I retained of the porter with my tickets and money was a thin metal disc with a number.

The language seemed to me like the hissing of a great steam-engine, and at times I thought the people were like monkeys spitting out the husks of sunflower seeds. I sat down by the station ikon, where a vast number of little tapers burnt like a shower of golden flames before the sparkling chasuble of a glass-eyed Virgin. I felt as though I had passed out of normal, European life and was lost among the people of some teeming weird old city in far-off China.

A beggar in bark shoes and tatters came and bowed himself in two before me, holding out his filthy hat and muttering in a moaning voice some long litany of sibilants and gutturals. I gave him a coin, for which he crossed himself and bowed to the ground. Immediately the halt, the lame, the blind, and the leprous swarmed round me with

their litanies and hats. Only by dashing in among the crowd was I able to shake off the feeling that I was a poor dog on whom all the fleas of Russia had concentrated without pity.

Perhaps they were sent by a merciful heaven as a reward for my first act of almsgiving, for they drove me right into the way of luck. I heard a man saying bad things in a bated breath, and of course I recognised a gentleman at the strain. It was a good thing to hear a bit of old English even if it would not pass the censor, though it might have warmed the dramatic heart of Mr. G. B. Shaw.

This stray gentleman turned out to be a good friend. He had a working knowledge of Russian, and much experience of travel in Russia. His business in China carried him to and fro several times a year, and he knew every inch of the Trans-Siberian railway. It did not take him long to recover all my belongings for me.

Once on the train, I felt more secure, and entered into conversation with a Frenchwoman who was travelling to Kiev. At nightfall the conductor came and lifted up the back of the seats, so as to form sleeping berths, and spread out sheets and covers for the night. There was no light except a solitary candle, which flickered in a glass case over the door leading into the corridor. It was impossible to read, and inconvenient to sit on the beds. My berth was an upper one right over that of the French woman. Our companions were two men, both of them very silent. One was evidently a State official, for he wore a white uniform and a white cap with a green peak and band. His chief interest was a tea-kettle, which he replenished at intervals, getting out at the stations and running along the platform to a tap labelled *Kipiatok* (boiling water). Again and again he would open a large wicker basket and take out a wing or leg of cold chicken, gnawing it ravenously with his yellow teeth, and throwing the bones under the seat. The basket must have contained a slaughtered fowl-house,

for its owner never ceased pulling out legs and wings and devouring them. He enjoyed them so thoroughly, munching and smacking his lips, that he seemed never to be able to say "Stop!" to his appetite. Never before had I seen such a picture of gluttony. I little suspected it was to be my almost daily companion during all my stay in Russia.

I clambered up on to the berth, drew the curtain, and undressed. The train went rumbling on, drawing up with sudden jolts at dimly lighted stations, and sounding its dismal, long-drawn hoot as it meandered across the dreary plains.

I fell asleep at last, after the gluttonous official had packed himself snugly between the sheets and began to snore with loud, long trumpeting.

I must have slept more than an hour, when suddenly, like a bolt from the blue, I felt the world collapse, and found myself landed on the floor between the seats. I looked up and saw that my berth had collapsed, I shuddered to think that the Frenchwoman must be crushed beneath it. Yet she had made no cry. The glutton sprang out of bed in his underdrawers, and began waving his arms and muttering awful things I failed to understand.

It was dreadful. I felt guilty of the poor Frenchwoman's blood. The back of the seat had slammed almost clean into its original place, except for a heap of bedclothes which blocked its path. Was she there behind the heavy monster of wood and springs, crushed to death?

I turned to the gesticulating man with a look of appeal, addressing him in all the civilised tongues. Fortunately he understood one or two words of French.

"*Ecrasée ?*" I asked, pointing to the mass of bedclothes squashed in the jaws of the monster.

His French was execrable, but it relieved my feelings. No, the lady was not crushed. She was not there. She had gone out during the night. He lifted up the monster and disclosed a forsaken bed.

"Madame has gone to her doom by another way," he said, sniggering and growing excited. "She has a travelling acquaintance in the sleeping car."

We made haste to fix up the berth and remove all trace of the accident.

When the Frenchwoman came back at dawn, she slipped between the sheets and settled down without suspecting her ribs were lucky. They might have been crushed by the monster if she had lingered in the arms of gentle sleep.

Her revenge, however, came later. Just as the train was steaming into Warsaw I happened to be taking my morning wash in the lavatory. The window was so smoke begrimed that I did not realise we had reached the terminus. When I heard the tramp of porters' feet and the noise of the general scramble, I hurried back to my compartment. To my dismay, I found it completely empty. My black bag, containing my passport and valuables, had disappeared.

An enterprising porter attached himself to me. I conveyed to him by signs that my bag had been taken from the rack. Thinking it was chiefly a job for the police, he took me along to the station *gendarmerie*, where a desperate attempt was made by half a dozen men, elaborately armed with swords and pistols, to extract the truth from the fast-developing clouds of mystery.

A large crowd began to gather. Among them was a youth with a satchel under his arm. He was evidently on his way to school. Hearing that an Englishman was in distress, he bravely came forward to my rescue, being; he claimed, versed in the language of Shakespeare.

"Olla rite?" he asked, standing out like a hero of knowledge among the dark crowd.

"Damn it!" I replied. "It's all wrong! I have a train to catch at the Brest Station, and if I lose the connections I shall be hopelessly astray."

My time table had been faithfully arranged by my friends somewhere in the depths of the Russian country, and people

had been told off to meet me at the difficult places of change. I tried to make the youth understand I was in a great hurry, and wanted to find my bag.

He smiled and smiled and bowed most gracefully, raising his college cap with perfect politeness, as if to let me see his smile of pleasure oozing out at the tips of his red hair.

"Sir, olla rite!" was all he replied to my detailed explanations.

I was rescued from tragic consequences by the advent of a man who had been hunted up from somewhere by the stationmaster. The youthful monument of knowledge dwindled away into the crowd when he heard the new arrival ask a full sentence in perfect, intelligible English.

He kindly explained everything to the officials. They dragged me in and out the offices of the entire station for over an hour. No sign of the bag anywhere.

"Perhaps a porter has taken it over the river to the Brest station," the chief of police suggested. "Porters often rush into the compartments, seize the luggage, and rush off, expecting the owners to follow them."

The Brest Station was about a couple of miles away. I had to go there for the train to Kiev, in any case.

As I went out of the station to get a cab, I ran into the man from China.

"I'll take you down there by tram," he said. "You'll get there quicker. The cabmen here are sharks. They'd swallow a foreigner and sell his skin."

At the Brest Station we made enquiries for a black bag. Again no trace of it. I was hot and weary, and had had no breakfast.

"Let's go and have breakfast," I proposed to the man from China.

In the tawdry restaurant, where the smell of cooking mingled with the smoke of the engines and the tapers burning before the holy ikons, we looked around for a seat. At a table in one of the corners I saw a sight that made me

start with surprise and sudden hope. The silent man who occupied the berth opposite mine in the coupé, was sitting at coffee with the Frenchwoman who had narrowly escaped being crushed by the fall of my berth. Did she know anything about my black bag? I approached her very politely and laid my distressful case before her.

No, she had seen no one take my bag. She had been too busy about her own. What a *ville de voleurs* was Warsaw! Perhaps Monsieur might find his bag at the station by this time. In any case, it was worth while going back to see whether it had turned up. Things did turn up sometimes quite as though by miracle.

"Poor woman!" I thought. "If she only knew how things sometimes turn down." I wondered whether the silent man had told her about the berth. I gathered she did not know, for she spoke to me in my own tongue, quite nicely, gently, and with just a little simper.

The man from China offered to accompany me on the trip back to the Vienna station. There, however, we found nothing but a long protocol, already drawn up and executed in the name of the law.

"Some poor devil will go to Siberia for this," the man from China suggested. "I've seen gangs of them walking along under escort when I've been passing through that country. The police just like a peg on which to hang a man that's troublesome."

Whether that was true or not, I couldn't say. Time was wearing on, and I had to be back at the Brest Station to catch my train. There was just half an hour to spare. If the bag didn't turn up within that space of time it would have to stay behind. Nothing was more embarrassing than to be without a passport in Russia, but it couldn't be helped.

I arrived back at the station in time to make an enquiry at the *chef de gare's* office. Nothing had turned up. The train was waiting outside; the second bell had rung. In despair, I left my address with the stationmaster and

rushed out to get into the train. The third bell rang, and the train moved off. As I jumped on to the step of the carriage I heard a voice calling my name. Looking back, I saw the silent man waving his hands furiously.

"Your bag is found!" he cried out. "It is inside the station. I have been hunting for you!"

"Take it to the stationmaster!" I shouted back, cupping my hands to my mouth and risking a fatal fall.

Just a minute too late! I was doomed to be parted from my property as soon as I entered Russia. Would I leave Russia with any? Time would show.

Meanwhile I staggered along the rattling corridor to find a seat. People were already taking out their tea kettles and drinking. I opened a sliding door and looked in to see if a seat was free. A couple of thin arms went up into the air, and a woman's voice exclaimed "*Oh, là! là!* You have turned up at last!"

Before me sat the fatal Frenchwoman. Quivering with excitement, she offered me her apologies. She hoped Monsieur was not offended. It was all a mistake. That black bag! Never in all her life would she forget that black bag. It must have been made by a man with the Evil Eye.

"*Tenez! Monsieur!* come in and sit down. I will tell you how it happened!"

I went in and sat down. She took out a flask of cognac and moistened her tremulous throat.

"It was like this! Oh . . .!" Her dark eyes rolled up and traversed the ceiling. "One can hardly believe it. You remember that tall man who sat so still and silent in our compartment? What a strange man! All those miles face to face with me and never a word! I thought he was one of your compatriots. Well, when the train stopped at Warsaw you were not in the compartment. If you had been I would certainly have asked you. But only the silent man remained, so I was obliged to ask him. I wanted some one to share a cab with me. It would be less expensive

than if I took a cab alone. A sou saved is a sou to spend. I was surprised when the man replied. Can you imagine anything more startling? He was a Frenchman! Oh . . . !”

Once more her dark eyes rolled up and traversed the ceiling.

“ I never knew a Frenchman could keep such a secret ! He agreed to share the cab, of course. Gallantry, you see. We both had porters, who took down our baggage and put it on the cab. We decided to spend the morning together, visiting the town, so when we reached the station, we had the baggage put into the consigne. I noticed a black bag which the porter placed with the rest of the luggage in the cab, but I took it to be his, because he didn't say anything about it. It was only after you saw us that I remembered the bag and spoke to him about it. He said he thought it was mine. What a story ! Oh . . . !” Madame quenched her emotion with a pull at the cognac flask. “ To think that we gave you all this trouble ! ”

I was not thinking anything of the sort. I was trying to remember. Yes, I could vaguely see everything once again—the horrified, gesticulating, jabbering official in his underdrawers, the mass of tangled bedding on the floor, the fallen monster crushing the Frenchwoman beneath its mass of wood and springs, and the silent man slumbering on up there in the opposite berth. No, he was not slumbering. He was not there at all. He had gone out somewhere. It was strange I had not noticed it clearly at the time. He was in his berth in the morning as silent and aloof as ever, and the little simpering Frenchwoman was blissfully asleep in hers.

I felt quite sure he could never have told her how narrowly she had escaped being crushed. Perhaps there was method in his silence. The Judgment Day may show.

II

My luggage was recovered by my Russian host some time later. It was well for me that I had come to stay with a

member of the Council of Empire, for my lack of passport was not counted a crime. Count Torloff and his family were excellent people, very hospitable and well behaved. They were very proud of their connection with the Baltic Barons, and thought themselves far superior to the average Russian members of the nobles' caste. They felt a sense of leadership over a people who required both the stimulus and reins of a strong, wise government.

They led a life of old fashioned piety, frequenting the village church, and reading the New Testament every day. Their sense of good form and decency was true to Western type, and they strove to maintain English standards both in their ideas of propriety and convention. They were, in fact, Anglomaniacs of the higher order.

Their country house stood in the midst of a beautiful park bordered by a slow, broad river. All around for miles spread the undulating South Russian country, whitening here and there with chalk hillocks and darkening with pine forests. Meadowland alternated with cornfields, vast, shimmering stretches of green and gold that sighed beneath the breezes from the steppes.

Count Torloff was proud of his estates. He had worked all his life to improve the ill-cultivated land he had received in heritage from his father, a man who had abhorred the soil and followed a soldier's life.

On the walls of Count Torloff's study hung photographs of the estate when he became its master. They showed stretches of land ploughed in a primitive manner, ramshackle barns and sheds.

"Look at these hovels," he said, pointing to a photograph of some dilapidated mud huts. "They were the cowsheds. The peasants' huts were no better. Now come and see how I've changed all that!"

He took me to the farmyard, and showed with gleaming pride the neat, clean cowsheds, the dapper stables, the

dazzling white cottages of the farm hands. Across the river rose the tall chimneys of a factory.

"I started to cultivate beet for sugar," he said, pointing towards the factory. "It has been a great success. All this land about here was just scratched for wheat and rye, but since I've grown beet, I've made everybody richer . . . but not happier!"

I inspected the schools, the church, the college, the hospital, the club, and the model dwellings, all of which were due to his generosity and initiative.

"I borrowed the money in Germany," he explained to me. "I had to get capital somewhere. It took me ten years to pay it back, and since then I have raised all these things on the soil—schools, houses, hospital, church—everything."

From the tall chimneys of the sugar-beet factories long banners of smoke streamed forth and glided gently along the horizon.

"But I don't know whether it's God's way in the long run," he said somewhat sadly. "Since the Revolution of 1905 we've had no real peace. When we left them to till the soil, the peasants seemed happy enough, but as soon as you take them into the factories and teach them to run a machine, they think they are entitled to run the whole show and take all the profits. If the thing was a failure, they would run away like rats."

I enjoyed my stay so well that I determined to remain in Russia and study the language and people. For this purpose my host recommended me to some of his relations in Kharkov, where I entered on a course of studies at the University.

War broke out while I was there. My services were accepted as interpreter. The social life of Russia, however, interested me more closely than the episodes of war. The ferment in the heart of Russia seemed to foretell tremendous and world-shaking happenings.

CHAPTER III

RASPUTIN

I

THE alarming stories of Rasputin, the strange peasant at the Court of the Tsar of all the Russias, filled me with a strong desire to see and hear the man myself. To the vast majority of the Russian aristocracy, and especially to the intelligentsia, he was a monster of iniquity. To a very select few—those, in fact, who had personal relations with him—he was a saint and the protagonist of a great ideal.

Knowing so well the lives and mentality of the Russian aristocracy and intelligentsia, I made appropriate deductions from all the sordid stories which flitted from mouth to mouth like honey-harvesting bees on an over-fragrant lime tree. That there could be anything pure and sacred in such an atmosphere was as much a possibility as expecting lilies to flourish among the mushrooms of Paris.

In Kharkov, at the house of the nobility, there was always a wave of wrath, a billow of emotion, a waterspout of indignation whenever Rasputin's exploits were mentioned. The shame of Russia? Worse! The ruin, the degradation, the profanation of the highest institution in the country. Not the Church. By no means. Who believed in the Church? A collection of out-of-date superstitions, fit to keep the peasants in their places and prevent the nobles from being swamped out of existence! Even the Church was a poor instrument for exercising moral authority. It depended on the strong arm of the Tsar. The Church could never prevent a revolution. The Tsar and his armies alone

gave the country a sense of security, and the nobles their right and chance to enjoy life.

If one has never seen a Russian in the throes of emotion one has missed a great lesson. It is like probing a bleeding sore that throbs and throbs and refuses to be staunched. When once he starts, he pants forth his soul like turgid water gushing from a waste pipe. To listen to him after the first sign of danger is to bring the deluge on to oneself, and to increase his palpitations tenfold. Remove your presence and the man's emotions die like vapour in a bottomless pit, for the Russian dearly loves an audience. He is a born actor.

But if you care to listen to him during one of his soulful attacks, you will be astonished beyond words. He may have been the cheeriest of friends, the brightest of companions a moment before, but if you have given him offence in any manner, real or imaginary, he will paint you as the blackest of villains, the wickedest and most venomous of blackguards. Your very kindnesses will be described, with all the art and cunning of the Father of Lies, as veiled and subtle evils intended to harm him under the cloak of hypocrisy. He will lay his tongue to all the words of abuse in the Russian vocabulary. They are legion. *Ruganye* (abuse), is the national accomplishment, the why and wherefore of three-quarters of Russia's life and action.

Honour, truthfulness, loyalty, morality, virtue, and conscience are just words in Russia. Nobody in general except a few benighted persons contemptuously called "fanatics," cares about them. The only use a Russian usually has for them is to employ them as cudgels with which to belabour his neighbour. It is amusing to hear him. Under any regime, in any class, he raves against his fellow. He may—in fact, you know he has been cheating himself, robbing his employer, the State, the Church, anybody, committing the grossest excesses; yet listen to him raving with a throbbing chest, a gesticulating hand, a

prophetic, holy, virtuous voice, against "that unconscionable, that rogue, that thief, that shameless one!"

His imagination supplies him with a sheaf of highly-coloured epithets

An hour later he tells you he doesn't believe there is such a thing as a pure man or woman, an honest, moral, or loyal one. Everything is possible, he tells you with a decided gesture of his right hand. By that he means all evil is possible. He doesn't believe in the good. For him the good is mere material well-being, plenty to eat and drink, and, of course, gross indulgence.

Whenever he comes up against something finer than himself, his fevered brain attributes to it all sorts of secret evils. In no case will he allow that there can be anybody better than himself. He delights in telling evil stories about the man or woman who believes and practises a code of faith and morals.

He cannot force himself to accept such people as sincere realities. Why should they practise virtue, he asks? He is a Russian "Intelligent." God, religion, conventions? He dismisses them as vaporous myths melted in the blast of science. Only "life" is real. It can only be lived once, so enjoy it to the very dregs. As for the State and society, they are mere conveniences for life, the more you get by them the luckier you are.

Thus Mr. Russian Intelligent reduces all to nihilism. He is conscientiously logical. It is the logic of lava conscientiously creeping down the side of the fiery mountain and blotting out all the fairest things of creation by virtue of the law of gravitation. Lava has nothing to do with Spring and the growth of fresh, vigorous, healthy plants. Neither has the Russian Intelligent. He is a man without faith or virtue. Society withers and fades into a corrupt mass of ugliness and decay wherever he treads.

No wonder Rasputin and the Empress were victims of his spirit.

II

It was through the kindness of Princess Galsin that I first met Rasputin. I had gone up to Petrograd, and was invited to stay with the Princess at Tsarskoe Selo. That was in April 1915.

Princess Galsin was a remarkable woman. She lived in a stone Gothic villa not far from the Palace. She was a widow, and spent her days looking after her two sons and a very pretty daughter. After my experiences of the Moscow nobility, I found this ideal home very refreshing.

A husband had once been the sun of Princess Galsin's life. He had been dead some ten years when I arrived at Tsarskoe Selo. Nevertheless, his devoted widow was convinced he still hovered spiritually around her, moving stealthily behind her when she moved about the house or sweeping past her at odd moments with a rustle of ethereal clothing, like a sudden gust of wind in an invisible aspen tree.

This ghostly habit of the departed one was by no means a delight for nervous guests. He had the knack of coming and going without any by-your-leave, and would burst in upon unsuspecting people particularly when their colour was heightened by peppermint-flavoured vodka, for which Princess Galsin had a strong inclination and consumed at all times of the day.

On the evening of my arrival I was duly impressed by his habits. He did not need to trouble me really, for there was no earthly reason for him to be jealous. For all her kind heart, Princess Galsin was a strange collection of yellow, unwashed flesh, unconventional hairs, telescopic chins, and innumerable blackheads. Moreover, she carried for ever about with her a musty old leather bag, richly ornamented with a gold coat of arms, from the depths of which she occasionally produced a black-bordered handkerchief and, after meals, a yellow ivory toothpick, set in a gold stem embossed with her princely coronet.

How well I remember being received by her on my arrival. The front door was opened by a young Caucasian footman, dressed in a blue-striped print jacket. Among the tall palms at the top of the red carpeted staircase stood Princess Galsin, smiling and holding out her richly jewelled hand.

Her welcome was very effusive. Her voice had a fluted sound like that of the blackbird, and her words of delight and pleasure seemed to have all the airiness, lightness, colour, and charm of bubbles blown by a throbbing spirit. Not a detail of my journey was allowed to escape her questioning attention. I gave her my assurance that all had been well. She could not help giving a dig at the intelligentsia.

"We never take the train either to or from town," she said. "You can never get rid of the atmosphere. You see the intelligents are such dreadful people, mental hooligans. One feels it in one's blood when they come near one. So vulgar, and quite impossible. I'm sure hell is paved with the minds of intelligents. If they sat still and looked at the cows, one might bear them. But they can't live without talking, and what they say is a real torture. It reveals all the barrenness, the madness of their minds. To listen to them is to feel the world is a living grave, no hope, no light!"

"No hope, no light," she repeated in a delightfully expressive, mellow voice, endowing the long syllables with rich intonations. Then she led me into a dim room, after ordering the footman to take my belongings to my room.

About the walls of the dim room hung Turkish carpets, panoplies of Caucasian weapons, rusty helmets and swords. A glance told me they were all richly chased and encrusted. Here and there a photograph cast a suggestion of life into their museum-like detachment. A couple of Turkish divans stood alongside the walls, and a few dusty leather chairs circled round a massive writing desk littered with an

inextricable mass of papers, letters, books, pens, cases, scraps, cards, money, etc. Presiding over this altar of anarchy stood a high-backed, carved wooden chair, dotted with purple pomegranates. On this throne Princess Galsin took her seat with majestic dignity, her grey head crowned by the enormous gold coronet surmounting the late Prince's initials on the back of the chair.

"They have no hope, and no light," Princess Galsin again repeated, ringing the bell. "They believe in the Revolution as though it is going to make a paradise of earth. They are so material. If they overthrow the Tsar, they will set up another, perhaps ten times worse. They talk for hours about the justice and freedom—the noble life that is to be. It's all to take place with a stroke of that magic wand, the Revolution. And all the while their personal lives are sheer horror! None of them dreams of realising freedom and justice and nobleness of thought and deed in his or her own life. Why should they? They don't believe in God or religion. They have no mystical motive to be righteous. They imagine all the good things will come automatically with the overthrow of the Tsar. It's the system that's rotten, they say. I rather think it's themselves."

She ordered coffee and liqueurs when the footman appeared. I thought she looked like a yellow high priestess, as she sat pontifically beneath the golden coronet. She offered me a glass of vodka.

"I have this flavoured with peppermint," she remarked. "When you get back to England you will be able to make it by adding some peppermint to your gin."

I was delighted with the advice.

"Revolutions are no good," she assured me. "It's the inner man that has to be changed. The Intelligent doesn't understand that. If they would only start realising in their daily lives what they dream about and talk about so much we should hear less about the violent revolution. The Kingdom of God is within you. The Russian Intelligent

is rotten to the marrow. That's why he dreams so much of the Ideal."

I found these remarks not far from the results of my own observations of Russian society. Princess Galsin, however, went on to explain her view of how the social menace was to be combated.

"No doubt you've heard of Gregory?" she asked. "He's the saviour of Russia."

I opened my eyes at the suggestion. It was the first time I had met anyone who believed in him. I asked what his plan of action was.

"The rejuvenation of Orthodoxy and Autocracy, and the welding of the throne with the Russian people," Princess Galsin replied.

I naturally asked for details, but at that moment the Princess suddenly laid her bejewelled hand on my arm.

"Hush!" she said, looking at me with wide open eyes. "My husband is moving about the house."

With uplifted finger she listened to the footsteps in the hall. If I had not been forewarned I should have taken them for those of the footman or some other servant. With the utmost attention I listened while the sounds went on. Some one seemed to be pacing up and down the spacious hall. Of a sudden the door opened noiselessly. There was a strange silence for a few moments, followed by a furious rustle like the flapping of a hundred flags.

No one appeared. I looked at Princess Galsin in amazement. She was smiling gently, gazing all the while at the golden ikon of the Kazan Virgin in the corner of the room, her eyes lit up with a strange, ecstatic glow. The silence was uncanny.

Suddenly a quiet voice said: "*Gospodi pomilui!*" (Lord, have mercy) and once again the strange rustling sound filled the room. Princess Galsin crossed herself piously and breathed a prayer. She rose from her seat and shut the door. I thought how strange it was for the invisible one to forget

his manners, but it was characteristic of the Russian. He never closes a door behind a lady, or himself, if he can help it. That is a menial's job. It was interesting to learn that the other world had nothing to teach in the way of Western manners.

There was a strange odour in the room. It soon vanished when I smoked a cigarette.

"It may seem unusual to you to witness these things," Princess Galsin remarked at last. "But to me they are my daily experience. I can't really explain why my husband comes so often. It's his voice I recognise, and the strange odour is the same as that which he liked for his cigarettes. He used to consume hundreds every day, and had them made at Tiphlis with a secret perfume of the mountain tribes. He died in Rome of over-smoking."

"Has he visited you ever since his death?" I asked.

"No!" she replied. "All was as usual after death until I started theosophy and psychical research. Of course I am a strict Orthodox, but the Church cannot explain all things. Since I took up Psychical Research I have come to realise that the human brain is not the only instrument of intelligence. I became aware of my husband's presence. Unrest in the other world runs in the family. One of the Galsins was exiled by Peter the Great to Siberia and died there. His soul is never at rest, and troubles relations at all times in spite of the Requiems we've had said for him. Since I made the acquaintance of Gregory Rasputin, my experience of the spiritual forces of the world has been enriched beyond words."

I became deeply interested in her account of Rasputin's powers. Her enthusiasm for his ideas and actions induced me to infer that he was not so black as he had been painted. Fortunately, I was to have an early opportunity of meeting him.

In the midst of our conversation, the footman announced a visitor. It turned out to be a liveried messenger from the

Imperial Palace. He brought a letter bearing the Imperial crown.

Hastily opening and reading the message, Princess Galsin dashed off a few words in reply.

When the messenger had gone, she looked at me with beaming eyes.

"I'm very lucky to-day!" she remarked. "Gregory has invited me to a tea-party at his flat in Petrograd. I'll tell him you are anxious to meet him. You will be struck by his beautiful eyes and gestures. He is one of those wonderful peasants that Russia produces so often. He is a natural king. You've seen Shalyahpin, the famous actor and singer? He, too, was a peasant, but what a voice, what magnificent acting! Gregory is better. He is a prophet with all the grandeur and vision of a seer. And his physique is so wonderful that Michael Angelo would have been astounded to see a live man resemble so closely his immortal statues."

I hurried away to my room in order to leave my hostess to the exquisite enjoyment of anticipation. Upstairs, in my room overlooking the grounds of the Palace, I heard the same rustle of invisible clothing that had startled me in the dim room below. I concluded sceptically that the house was addicted to sudden draughts. In the night the furniture creaked and snapped uncannily.

CHAPTER IV

RASPUTIN (*continued*)

I

It was arranged that I should make the acquaintance of Gregory Rasputin on the following Sunday at the Imperial Chapel after Mass. Chance, however, forestalled the arrangement.

A Danish sculptor named Arenson, who was executing a tomb for Alexander III, happened to call on Princess Galsin. It was suggested the Princess and her family should pay a visit to his atelier, where they would see some interesting work. Accordingly they went, taking me with them.

As we stood admiring the artist's achievements, including a bust of Princess Galsin's beautiful daughter, we were startled by a voice behind us saying "Peace to the servants of God!" It was a voice that once heard could never be forgotten. Deep and melodious like the velvet tone of a cathedral bell, it vibrated with gentle power and manly pathos. The very sound was a poem, a lyric that needed no words. It is true that every Russian deacon strives to acquire a deep resounding voice, for Society used to pay a higher price for a deacon with a deeper voice at the church and home services which were so frequent before the Revolution. Visitors to the leading Russian churches marvelled at the organ-like tone of the bass voices of the choirs. But in this case, the spoken word was as rich and sonorous as that of a full-throated deacon intoning at a Moscow feast.

In the frame of the door stood the tall, huge shape of a man, clad in a peasant's garb. He advanced towards us with calm, easy strides, full of natural grace. When he had greeted his friends he looked at me. There was a leer on the sculptor's face, for he detested the peasant, and at Princess Galsin's house had spent more than an hour on hearty abuse of him. For which his hostess had been indulgent, owing to her suspicion that the artist was a Jew. Rasputin wished to rid Russia of the Jews, whom he considered to be the enemies of the Russian throne and religion, the plotters of revolution.

The artist looked at me with scorn in his eyes.

"*Voulez vous serrer la main à ce cochon-là ?*" he asked, knowing that Rasputin could not understand French, and concluding that I shared his own contempt for the famous peasant.

"With pleasure!" I answered to his astonishment. But before I could move, Rasputin seized my hand and rested it on his breast in the middle of his silky, black beard.

"You are the Ally?" he asked, exchanging glances with Princess Galsin.

At my reply, he smiled at me with his great eyes. They seemed to emit soft, velvety rays, caressing one almost as one feels the caress of a melodious voice. The power and charm of such eyes, combined with that deep, fluted voice, those massive shoulders and giant frame was obvious. Rasputin was the superman of body and soul. What he would have been if he had been an Intelligent, cannot be imagined. Perhaps he would have lost the secret force that made him what he was. Nature is deeper than science.

Meanwhile he held my hand against his beard and said in a rhythmic manner: "*Utrennaya rossa na nyejhnoy travye raduga radosti, no vyechernaya vlaga slyozy soodby!*" (The morning dew on the tender grass is a rainbow of joy, but the evening damp is the weeping of fate!)

I had been warned he was accustomed to make cryptic remarks so I took this with the proper respect.

It was impossible to have any conversation with him at that time, because the artist was weary of his presence and too hostile to see any good in him. I was lucky enough, however, to receive Rasputin's invitation to visit him whenever I pleased.

Princess Galsin's daughter insisted on taking a snapshot of the Staretz. For this purpose he stood before the sculptured tomb, saying these prophetic words :

" I stand by this tomb in order that I may bear witness to the source of Russia's greatness and the defender of the holy Orthodox Church. I fight for the Tsar, the Faith and Fatherland. While I am alive no harm shall ruin them, but if I perish, so shall they ! "

I thought at the time that he was striving to ensure his position at the Court and to warn off assassination. Since the day he was stabbed by a fanatical woman, he had had no peace of mind on that score.

By startling coincidence his words have proved all too true.

II

The chance of meeting Rasputin in the intimate atmosphere of his own home was unusually precious. Fate, however, seemed determined to deny me that privilege. I was suddenly requested to accompany some foreigners to Moscow in order to act as interpreter for them. The matter being connected with the War, it was my duty to render this service.

I had not been in Moscow more than three days when a strange thing happened.

A young Russian friend introduced me to a daughter of one of the wealthiest Moscow merchant princes. He was particularly anxious I should make her acquaintance, as she entertained lavishly and was an original character.

Marya Mlozov was a pretty woman of twenty-two. When I was presented to her at her mansion, I was delighted to hear her speak perfect English. She had fair hair and dark eyes, the whites of which seemed like saucers. The footman had hardly announced my name when she sprang up from the Turkish divan on which she was reclining and seized my hand. My friend could only make a "cussed" gesture with his hand and jerk his head in despair. I caught a look of amusement in his eyes.

She drew me to the divan and, having induced me to sit there, threw her lithe form among the pink cushions at the other end. She immediately began in panting tones to entertain me with her personal history.

Without a blush she told me that she had married a man a few months previously, and had sent him about his business a fortnight after the marriage ceremony.

"When one is rich, one need not be burdened with a husband," she remarked. "Of course, I married a man just for form. People still have prejudices. Of course, I know you English believe in hypocrisy, but we Russians are different. We wish to be free!"

She sighed very deeply and looked pathetically affected.

"Ah! Freedom! What is life without freedom!"

I was then informed that since dismissing her husband, who had willingly taken a lump sum and gone off "to take the waters" with another fellow spirit, she had decided to make her home a temple of Art and Fellowship.

I did not need to be told that Art stood on a high pedestal in the house. From the steps of the hall to the room in which we were sitting was a long gallery of gleaming Apollos and Venuses, while on the walls hung Post-Impressionist pictures of a daring type.

"I want to make you an Initiate!" she exclaimed. "Akh! Akh! Choodyesno! (wonderful!) We haven't got an Englishman in the Fellowship. That will be amusing!"

She clapped her white, bejewelled hands with delight, her entire frame quivering with excitement.

A troop of visitors came in. Students, officers, dashing cavalrymen, clinking their swords and jingling their spurs. They bowed their glossy heads over Marya Mlozov's perfumed hand, kissing it ardently in the Russian manner. She seemed like an Oriental lady receiving the homage of her suitors.

"My darlings!" she called out, as the kissing ceremony finished and the scraping of jingling heels and the bowing of heads ceased. "I've got a great joy in store for you! The first man who guesses it shall have the honour of being my cavalier for the occasion."

"A midnight ball?" suggested an officer with fierce moustaches.

"How banal!" she retorted, distorting her features in a Gorgon look of contempt.

At each guess she renewed the grimace. I was not surprised at that, because Russians have no scruples about showing their feelings. It is part of their idea of freedom. And here was a leader of the "best" Moscow society presenting to her guests all the contortions of a Charlie Chaplin!

"You'll never guess!" she exclaimed. "I must tell you, blockheads! I'm entertaining my wounded officers to night (one wing of her great house was set apart for the care of wounded officers). I've ordered the best singers and entertainers. Five hundred roubles (50 pounds) each! I've beaten Philipova!"

She clapped her hands with delight. Philipova was the wife of another Moscow millionaire and a rival in society entertaining. I was fated to meet her two years later.

"Just picture to yourselves!" she added, her lips unrolling with contempt. "She offered them fifty roubles for the evening! And yet she is sure to sit in her grand box at the Bolshoi Theatre with her flabby hand always glued

to her face so that people may see her famous pearl ring. It's as big as a pigeon's egg!"

This was indeed true, for I had seen the lady and her pearl myself, when the audience of the theatre were overcome with emotion as she entered the notorious Philipova box.

"So I multiplied her insulting offer by ten, and they are all coming," she went on. "But more than that. You will have a tremendous surprise!"

What that surprise consisted in she resolutely refused to disclose. "I expect you all to stay to dinner," she announced. "Afterwards we shall all go to the Artistic Theatre to see Kachalov in Ibsen's 'At the gates of the Kingdom.' My box will take you all, and we can come back with the cast."

Accordingly, from four to seven the time was passed in chatter, smoking, tea-drinking (a hissing samovar was renewed at intervals by a huge Cossack footman) while the fierce-moustached officer sat down at the piano and played Chopin exquisitely. Another related blood-curdling incidents of the campaign in East Prussia, and relieved the effect by reciting delicate poems of his own composition.

After dinner, the footmen called some cabs and we drove to the theatre. It was about eleven when we returned, bringing with us a bevy of fair actresses, whom I did not recall having seen on the stage.

Everyone was agog to know what the promised surprise was. Marya Mlozov laughed and joked and looked divinely Delphic.

Other visitors were waiting in the drawing-room. From the upper storey came the strains of a gypsy band, the soft twanging of the balalaikas mingling with the sonorous voices of the gypsies, men and women.

Our beaming hostess clad in a shimmering white satin dress, her neck ablaze with diamonds, led the way upstairs to the suite of rooms prepared for the evening. We entered a sumptuously furnished, gilded hall, round three sides of

which ran purple divans, copiously littered with cushions. Through an archway at the far end could be dimly glimpsed the banqueting table, piled high with delicacies and wines. From the roof of the hall hung silver lamps with blue and red glass, through which the floating wicks sent down a mellow, religious light.

Some young officers rose from the divans as we entered. They were the inmates of the "lazaret" who had recovered from their wounds and were to return to the front on the morrow.

When all the guests were duly congregated, Marya Mlozov enthroned herself on the central divan, and called out to the gypsy band concealed in the banqueting room beyond the archway.

Immediately the twanging balalaikas set up their soft caressing music, and a handsome swarthy Tsiganka, wearing a black and red shawl, advanced barefoot into the middle of the room. She held aloft a glass of sparkling champagne. Her bare feet patted on the parquet floor, while her lithe body swayed and writhed like a snake to the accompaniment of the hidden balalaikas.

The dim, flickering light of the overhanging lamps gave her the look of a pagan priestess, performing a mysterious rite. Suddenly she burst into song, rich, rapturous and throbbing with feeling. She swayed herself towards our hostess, reaching out the sparkling wine-glass and singing :

" As the fragrant flower
Sheds its scent around,
So let joyful hearts
O'erflow with song and sound !

Let's all drink to Mária,
Mária dear and kind,
While we're all a-drinking
None other such we'll find ! "

She stepped forward and placed the wine-glass in Marya Mlozov's hand, ordering her to drain it to the dregs. While this was being done, the male voices of the band and all

the reclining guests repeated the couplet with tremendous enthusiasm. The balalaikas seemed to tear their strings in a mad whirl of melody. If anyone could have felt cool and unstirred in such an atmosphere, he would have deserved to enter Kingdom Come on the spot.

Suddenly the gypsy leaped into the air with a great bound, flinging wide her red and black shawl. So startling was her spring that she seemed to me like a great bird of ill omen, spreading out its crippled wings in a struggle to fly away. From her upstretched throat came a shriek :

“ Shatter the glass ! ”

Marya Mlozov sprang up with a lightning movement, and like a haughty defiant queen, dashed the glass on to the floor. It smashed into a hundred glittering pieces.

The gypsy lifted up her swarthy hands, her red and black shawl looking like a priestly garment. A grave, dismal look crept over her features.

“ Such is life. So passes happiness ! ” she said in solemn tones.

Then throwing out her arms again with a wild gesture of despair, she called out : “ Live ! Live ! ”

At this command the voices and the balalaikas burst once again into melody, wild, tumultuous, maddening.

The gypsy swayed her way back to the banqueting hall and returned with a new glass of champagne. She advanced with it in the same order as before, offering it to the guest on the right of the hostess. She sang a new verse and introduced the guest's name into the couplet. Then the glass was drained and smashed once more, and the ceremony was repeated till all the guests had been toasted. At the end the broken glass was swept up and the floor made ready for dancers and singers.

While a song was in progress the footman ushered in a tall form. In the excitement and dim light no one noticed him, but as he came across the room after the conclusion of the song, I was startled to recognise Gregory Rasputin !

III

The surprise that fell on the revellers left them speechless for a few moments. Then, as Marya Mlozov rose to greet the Staretz with a look of triumph beaming in her eyes, a burst of applause broke spontaneously from the onlookers. The sensation was enormous. Young officers shouted "Bravo!" and "Urta!" with that short clipping of the "a" which makes the sound rather comical to British ears.

In response to this show of enthusiasm, Rasputin bowed, and said in his deep resounding voice :

" Zviozny vyecher Boja riza. Tikhim khorovodom plashoot zvyozdy do zolotoy zari. Raby Bozhny, vyesyeleetyes ! "

(' The starry evening is the chasuble of God. In a gentle rondo, the stars dance till the golden dawn. Servants of God, make merry ! ')

The gipsy woman took this for a hint that she should offer Rasputin the customary toast, and came forward with a glass of champagne. Marya Mlozov, however, briskly ordered her to retire.

A footman came in with a small table, which he placed at one end of the room and covered with a white cloth. Marya Mlozov's gold marriage ikon was brought and placed on the table, together with some wax tapers.

A bearded priest and deacon, who had evidently arrived with Rasputin, waddled in, and took up their stand before the improvised altar. The priest was robed in a gorgeous cape, while the deacon swung a fuming thurible. Together they chanted some prayers and intoned the " Lord have mercy," with sepulchral rumblings. I believe the priest was one of the Old Believers, for he intoned forty " Lord have mercy's " and crossed himself forty times in succession. The officers performed the ceremony with proper reverence, and congregated in a lump before the priest while he read a chapter of the Gospel over their bowed

heads. When the ceremony was at an end, they filed past the priest, and kissed the painted cross he held out to them. A few minutes afterwards some of them told me they did not believe in any faith.

"Then why do you perform these actions?" I asked.

"*Tak pologaetsa,*" they replied. (It is the rule.)

The unexpected arrival of Rasputin filled them with delight. One of them, a young fair-haired officer with great powers of loquacity and a know-all manner, began to detail all the horrible things that Rasputin would presently accomplish. With cool cynicism they discussed the amount of intoxicating liquor necessary to set Rasputin going. Ghastly details of supposed incidents, which they could not possibly have verified, were related with ardent enthusiasm, interspersed with genial execrations. Mentally finding a least common multiple of all the lurid assertions, I found that nothing less than a gallon of vodka would overpower Rasputin's gigantic frame.

Like true conspirators, they settled among themselves by what means they were to induce him to consume the necessary amount, should he have no desire for an orgy. They were all to feign conversion and beg him to pledge their new born faith in champagne. Each one was to demand a separate pledge.

To me their minds, so typical of the Russian Intelligentsia, were a source of wonder. They knew quite well that the sale of intoxicating drinks was forbidden by the Tsar, yet here they were looking forward to an orgy of drinking, and its shameful results, without the slightest scruple. It was characteristic that they gave so much credit to the fabrications of malicious gossip, and expected to get their share of fun from its victim. Like most Intelligents, they took so morbid a pleasure in the weaknesses of human nature, that they had no faith or will for the sterner qualities.

When the priest and deacon had gone, Marya Mlozov invited Rasputin and the guests to the banqueting hall,

where over a hundred wax tapers were alight on the gilt chandeliers at both ends of the table.

Here, while the gipsy band twanged the balalaikas and sang in low, mysterious tones like a far-off hidden choir, the revellers began to devour the dainties. It was a real old Russian *Pir-Goroy*, a "mountain rout," the table being piled mountain high with food.

As for myself, I made half a dozen mortal enemies in ten minutes. Dishes of caviare and sturgeon, smoked herring and onion, all sorts of oily things, were brought to me, and literally forced down my throat. When I could stand it no longer, and protested against eating beyond my digestive powers, the hostess and her friends raised a terrible wail about my "bad manners."

Marya Mlozov told me that when in Rome one must do as Rome does. This, however, failed to make room in my stomach for the great dish of oily caviare—it had such a fishy taste—which she ordered me to consume.

Not wishing to be a killjoy or to upset them any further, I answered with a look of appeal:

"And kiss the Pope's toe?" I knew this was a standing horror to Russia.

Rasputin, who had come round to my side of the table, heard this remark, and was delighted.

"There! there!" he said, tapping me on the back. "A true son of the Catholic Church! Christ is the Head of the Catholic Church. The Pope of Rome is a heretic, a Latin monster, giving his toe to be kissed!"

This little outburst turned the tables for me. I was allowed to be judge of my own appetite and eating capacities. Latin heresy has its uses.

The Staretz, however, was the despair of the dare-devil officers. He refused, absolutely, to take any wine or spirit, saying that the Little Father had forbidden its sale, that his faithful subjects should try to make Russia a sober country. The officers imagined they would have to deal

with a simple-minded, ignorant, tame moujhiik, but found themselves confronted by a spirit superior to theirs in its firm adhesion to principle. Nevertheless, they decided Rasputin was "off drink" and playing the hypocrite.

I gathered from a young man who had been talking ardently with Marya Mlozov, that she was endeavouring to secure Rasputin as a sort of priest for her Temple of Art. It was well known that she had visions and strange visitants, one of whom had directed her to send her husband about his business. She appeared to have estimated Rasputin on the strength of the stories invented about him by the perfervid imagination of the "emancipated" class.

In this midst of the festive hubbub, a shriek rent the air. The clatter of the busy tongues ceased abruptly. Looking round, we discovered Marya Mlozov lying in the arms of Rasputin. The eyes of the officers beamed with pleasure.

Rasputin lifted the helpless form in his strong arms and went into the dimly-lighted hall, where he laid her on a divan. With a jingling of spurs and laughter, the revellers followed.

The great Staretz was as kind and gentle as a father to his infant. His deep-toned voice took on subtle intonations of pacifying power.

"Lie still, little dove! (*golubchik*)," he murmured. "Do not be excited! You need some cold water."

This chaste beverage was not at hand, so Rasputin requested a footman to bring some.

This was soon done. When Marya Mlozov recovered from her flush of excitement, due, I suspected, to overeating, she told every one to be seated.

Rasputin sat by her side in the place of honour. In the midst of all the hectic proceedings he retained his cool mastery.

Marya Mlozov clapped her hands for silence.

"You all know what my great surprise was," she said. "We have the Mystic Master in our midst. It is the seal

of consecration on this Temple of Art and mysticism, which I wish to make a centre of life. We shall now see the dance of the mystic maidens I have trained."

She clapped her hands.

The gipsy band started a lithe, lulling tune, exquisitely cadenced and softened; the voices of the hidden singers were mysterious and subdued, with that soft whispering of the words from the top of the throat which Russian singers love to affect.

With this hovering, break-of-dawn atmosphere casting a spell of eerie anticipation over the listeners, a gentle patter of feet was heard, mingled with the rustle of light, silky clothing.

Suddenly there was a rapid sound like the snipping of a cloth. Looking up I saw that a purple cloth, which presumably covered a life-sized picture in a gold frame, had rolled up with a snap. In the frame stood a beautiful girl, lightly clad in soft, flowing muslin.

From her scarlet lips came a passionate song. I could not catch all her words, but I heard a good deal about "*Ogni strasti*" (the flames of passion) and "*Ochi jhgoochiye*" (eyes that burn).

When this was finished, she leapt from the golden frame on to the divan. She had white wings attached to her back, but their first flight put rather a strain on their endurance, for one of them came off. This had to be repaired at once. Then the airy creature danced on tiptoe.

I was informed she represented the spirit of love descending from heaven to fire the hearts of men. From what I saw I was quite prepared to admit the episode was after the Fall.

Suddenly, at the call of the Spirit of Love, a dozen beautiful girls tripped through the open frame and leapt on to the floor. Each represented some joy or other resulting from Love's visit to the dwellings of men. I began to feel decidedly "not at home."

The twelve Mystic Maidens danced with a thrilling enthusiasm. They swayed their lithe bodies, tripped and gambolled with elfin glee, their flimsy robes flitting here and there like streamers in the wind.

When this was at an end, they rested their dainty bodies on the floor. An old English grandfather's clock in the corner struck midnight in velvet tones. Alexander Blok, a popular poet, who was among the guests, recited a poem of his own composition. It had a lot to do with burnt-out passions and faded hopes, deserted lovers and despair. After a passionate wail of exasperation, the poet led us to "the snowy night of Arctic realms, where all is peace from passion's storms." Having invited us to leave our hearts in this sort of cold storage, the gloomy poet stood gazing with tragic eyes into unseen depths. Since he confessed to having drained the senses of all their freshness and vitality, I was not surprised he found comfort in the grip of the North Pole. Ice is a good preservative for dead flesh.

While the despair of ice, snow and eternal night was sinking into the revellers' hearts, the Spirit of Love came tripping out of the banqueting room with a huge tankard of wine. It must have been a sort of loving cup, for she began to present it to each guest, who took a draught. My young neighbour told me it was a Thibetan potion, especially good for jaded hearts.

When the Staretz refused to drink, Marya Mlozov entreated him with wringing hands and tearful eyes. Her appeals were in vain. He declared time was getting late, and he did not wish to disturb the feast with his presence any longer. The officers crowded round him and begged him to stay, treating him with brotherly affection, which I knew was mere acting. Russians can act any mood to perfection, and pass themselves off for the gentlest and kindest creatures on earth till they get what they want. They will press their hands to their hearts, let their voices

ring with "feeling," soften the gaze with perfect loving-kindness, and swear by heaven they are telling you the truth, even crossing themselves, and giving their word of honour with tenfold force. If you believe one word or "feeling" you are doomed. Russians are born actors. They boast that they are not hypocrites like Westerners. The truth is they have nothing to be hypocritical about. Virtue and honour are non-existent, except among "fanatics," while public opinion was never strong enough to give virtue a leg to stand on. Moral strength was a monster to be hated.

So it was with Rasputin. His refusal to taste the Thibetan potion was finally attributed to hypocrisy. The sham was immediately shown up by the irate officers' rabid imaginations. The gentle words of brotherly persuasion gave place to fearful epithets. Some of them were already flushed with unwholesome, hectic hues. I realised that disaster, possibly a *Skandall* with all its riot of noise and violence, was inevitable. The atmosphere was heavily charged with the elements of those fierce social storms, so beloved of the Russians, with blows, foul language, smash-up and horrors, to be followed by heart-softenings, tears, repentance, vowings, embracings, pardonings, and universal forgiveness and brotherhood—in preparation for the next.

I slipped out with Rasputin, through the domestics who stood about the open door.

Outside in the cool night air, Rasputin allowed me to walk with him. He was desolate and aggrieved.

"What is the matter?" I asked. "Have you not enjoyed the evening?"

"Mister!" he replied, squeezing my arm in his powerful grip. "*Groostno!* It is sad! I am sad for Russia. Faith and piety have forsaken the soul. It howls like a wolf at the gate of a pest-stricken village, frightening honest folk. Russia perishes! *Poggibuyit! Poggibuyit!*" (It perishes!)

I asked him how he had come to *Marya Mlozov's* house.

"She has visions," he replied. "She came to me in Petrograd and begged me to explain them for her. She wished me to be present at the farewell party at her lazaret. The soldiers were returning to the front to fight for Faith, Tsar and Fatherland. 'In the name of God, do me this favour,' she said. 'You will have friends among the officers when they return to the front!' Well, I come, like a thief in the night I come. And I see——"

He held out his large white hands, as though powerless to express his feelings. The moonlight revealed the sadness of his eyes.

"I see 'A Banquet during the Plague.'"¹

This was an opera which Rasputin delighted to witness.

It was evident *Marya Mlozov* had lured Rasputin to her house under specious pretences. I discovered later that her example was followed by numerous other people, and it was under pretext of strengthening his cause for the regeneration of Russia, that his murderers lured him to Prince *Yusoopov's* house, and foully assassinated him.

We chatted on Russia and the War for a while. He had firm ideas on this subject. I suspected they were not entirely his own, for it seemed impossible that a man of his antecedents could have such a grasp of political matters. I gathered he wished for the triumph of Russia above all things, the occupation of Constantinople by the Little Father, and the restoration of the cross to Saint Sophia. In Russia he wished to have a Peasant Tsar, one who would defend the interests of the Orthodox peasantry against the Atheistic, riotous-living landlords and bourgeois, who spent most of their life abroad or bullying their peasants.

He did not wish Germany to be absolutely defeated for fear the monarchy should be overthrown.

¹ In the summer of 1918, *Marya Mlozov*, whose extravagances had long agitated Moscow society, went off her head, declaring she was a re-incarnation of the Holy Virgin, and about to give birth to a new saviour of the world, who would deliver the people from their woes. The Bolsheviks had her shut up in an asylum.

“The Kaiser is the Lord’s Anointed for the Germans,” he said naively. “We must not upset the Lord’s Anointed, for all power is from God.”

I promised to call and see him in Petrograd. As we parted, the beautiful chimes of the Kremlin bells rang out in the still night air. Rasputin’s stalwart figure passed across the deserted Red Square into the shadow of the motley domes of St. Basil’s cathedral, looking like a grim, squatting hydra in the pale moonlight. Before the ikon of the Saviour over the Spassky Gates, the sacred red light flickered and glowed. A squad of soldiers, crossing Moscow on their way to the front, passed across the chill cobbles like grim, voiceless ghouls, leaving a pungent odour of leather and stale clothing in their wake. As they descended the hill, they suddenly broke into song, a jaunty, rhythmic tune, full of strong accents, now bursting with volume, now sinking to a gentle hum. They crossed the river with a swinging shout of exultant defiance. Russia seemed safe, the Kremlin rich and calm in its ancient dreams.

CHAPTER V

THE EMPRESS AND RASPUTIN

ON my return to Petrograd, I soon heard lurid accounts of Rasputin's visit to the house of Marya Mlozov. There had been a terrible orgy. . . . I felt happy to be able to relate what had really occurred during the time the Staretz was present, but the thirsty souls of the scandalmongers, and the crafty minds of the political workers, refused to face the facts. It appeared to be true that Marya Mlozov's party soon degenerated into the customary Russian *kootyosh*, but neither I nor Rasputin was present. A *kootyosh* is a regular Russian riot of gastronomic, bibular, and Bacchanalian delights. The gross bourgeois society of Moscow vied with the "fine" aristocratic society of Petrograd in these savage rites. Grand Dukes were not above driving out to those mysterious villas on the "Islands" across the Kamenny Bridge, and lending an Imperial hand in letting hell loose. The Moscow bourgeois followed the grand ducal lead, and were whisked in fast-flying sledges over the glistening snow to the mysterious villas beyond Petrovsky Park.

To such people, the asceticism taught by Rasputin was a mortal offence. It must be remembered that although Russia abounds in princes and counts, they are in no way connected with the ancient traditions of Western chivalry. Their ideal is to wear fine raiments, eat fine food, enjoy sensual delights and parade at fashionable watering places. The idea of a lady or gentleman is completely absent in

Russia. Its lurid substitutes the *grande dame* and the *grand seigneur* are all too conspicuous. I once heard a French lady in Petrograd complain that the Russian aristocracy was similar to the French bourgeoisie. In fact, I think it was worse. It had mentally, and with regard to manners, all the characteristics of Ethel M. Dell's men and women, without their virtues, in an Oriental setting.

There was a lavish wealth of hand-kissing and bowing, a glitter of surface manners, which never survived the show. A Russian family will act the kindest of hosts, the politest of manners, and when the ill-liked visitor has gone, huge father, pretty mother, and all the little counts and countesses will join hands and romp round the tables, skip upstairs and down, in a feverish whirl of rejoicing for the visitor's departure. I have witnessed this performance time after time. I have also heard the assertion that the British are hypocrites.

I realised that the fearful things attributed to Rasputin were, in many cases, the actual doings of his accusers. Perhaps no man in history has been so furiously calumniated. This hatred of the Russian "aristocracy" and intelligentsia for the devout peasant, did not even spare the Empress and her daughters. Atrocious stories passed up and down Russia. I hardly found more than a dozen Russians, who had decency enough, not to say loyalty, to refuse credence to or actively discredit these evil inventions. Some of them actually thought they were doing a service to the Tsar by making a scapegoat of his "German" wife. They thought the Tsar would be safe if popular malice was turned against the Empress, to whom all the evils of the country were ruthlessly attributed.

The publication of Artzibashov's "Sania" knocked the last prop from beneath a very superficial structure of convention. Depravity became a token of "civilisation," free from the "prejudices" of the dark ages. Truly religious minds, such as those of Rasputin and many of the

so-called "Black Hundred," looked at this overwhelming wave of corruption with horror and alarm.

Small wonder that the Empress and her followers looked for the salvation of Russia to the closer union of the throne with the peasantry, to whom the old traditions of Orthodoxy, religion and morality were still living realities. The intelligentsia had gone astray into the putrid wilderness of materialism, looking only for the establishment of a society of mere comfortable conditions, idealising sensual orgies as the Paradise of the system. Just as virtue and sacrifice were the goal of the religious system, so the orgy and a merry life, were the natural ideal and point of gravitation of the Russian materialist mind. Apart from a few acid, faith-fired idealists of revolution, the general result of the eclipse of religious idealism was a hideous nightmare of gross sensuality. Every restraint was flung away as a "prejudice." Just as Lenin scorned truth and honesty as "capitalistic prejudices," so the intelligentsia despised virtue as a "prejudice of religious mythology."

The average Russian intelligent has an incurable love for dismissing whole centuries of human experience with a pontifical wave of the hand as "prejudice." He does not care to penetrate their mystery. "Science" has explained everything for him. Perhaps no country in the world had so many mental parrots as Russia. Religion is a "peasant prejudice." Yet it is curious that the Russian intelligent, having no desire to explore the higher forms of religious consciousness, goes down into the depths of materialism to explore the horrors of hell. Perhaps that is due to his nature. He gravitates towards the appeals of his lower nature, and shuns everything that demands a lasting effort and perseverance. Cardinal virtues he abhors.

In this atmosphere, Rasputin tried to work for the old ideals. In order to have an intimate talk with him, I called one day at his flat, after having much difficulty in making an appointment over the telephone. His servants had

ПОЧТОВАЯ КАРТОЧКА CARTE POSTALE.
Pocztówka.

RASPUTIN'S HANDWRITING. AN INVITATION TO THE AUTHOR TO TEA, WRITTEN ON A POSTCARD ENCLOSED IN A COURT ENVELOPE, AND DELIVERED BY A COURT FOOTMAN. THE WORDS ARE "PROSHU NA CHAI, GRISHA" (I INVITE TO TEA, GRISHA). THE SAME WORDS MIGHT ALSO MEAN : "I BEG FOR A TIP." RASPUTIN WAS TAUGHT HANDWRITING BY THE TSARINA.

grown suspicious of all except known visitors. Besides a host of people, ready to commit the noble deed of assassination for the glory of a political cause, there were hordes of sycophants, anxious to secure appointments for themselves or their protégés; depraved "converts," lured by horrible stories, and mistaking Rasputin's movement for a sort of sect after the "Scoptsi" style; ribald intelligents of the type of Dostoyevski's Karamasiev, anxious to scoff and condemn; and social climbers, feigning an attachment to religion and Rasputin, in order to get an entry into the Empress's most select coterie. Even Church dignitaries would stoop to the pretence of friendship in order to secure personal ends.

In spite of the difficulties, I managed to receive the message that the Staretz would be glad to see me at a tea party he was having that afternoon.

"To-day is a special meeting," the man-servant told me. "Only very special visitors are being received. High-placed persons are expected."

With this remark ringing in my ears, I considered myself particularly fortunate. I took an *izvozshchik* and visited St. Isaac's Cathedral in order to while away the time. The wonderful building was filled with mellow sunshine, setting the golden ikons and mosaics aglow. A crowd of pious worshippers stood before one of the ikons, where a priest, in a pink cope, was holding a droning service. His deep, guttural voice filled the lofty vaults and dome with weird echoes. The litany he was intoning must have been a weary one, for occasionally he took a small comb from his cassock pocket and passed it deftly through his flowing, well-greased locks towards the nape, drawling most placidly "*Gospodi molimsa!*" (Let us pray the Lord!)

It was not the first time I had witnessed this unconventional act in church. In churches with a mechanical liturgy in a dead or obsolete language, the droning priests often lapse into similar irreverences out of tedium. I once saw a

deacon come out of the sanctuary of a Moscow church with a tea-kettle, pass through the prayer-mumbling peasants and fill up the tea-glass of the verger, selling candles at a desk near the entrance. It all seemed so natural that no one noticed any irreverence.

In St. Isaac's an attempt had been made to lift the Eastern Church out of the rut of peasant, rustic worship. The building was Western, but the inevitable Russian spirit still gravitated towards lethargy, and a thinly veneered nihilism. The Mongol never dies in Russia.

Rasputin's flat was in the neighbourhood. About four o'clock I drove there, finding a few smart carriages waiting outside. I was surprised to see the fat coachman of Countess Klinmel, a notorious pro-German woman, whose sumptuous house on the Serguievskaya was a hot-bed of German propaganda. She was a great gambler and had a malicious wit, delighting in saying the nastiest things in the fewest words about all who crossed her path. This form of amusement was very popular in Petrograd society, and passed for witticism. She was said to have invented the notorious "Last drop of blood" story which the poor parrots of Russia repeated to their heart's content. That was when Mr. Lloyd George made a speech at the Guildhall, in which he declared that "Britain would fight to the last drop of blood."

The Russian pro-Germans immediately turned it into a malicious joke. I never heard the last of it. It was still going strong when the Revolution broke out. People would say: "Have you heard Lloyd George's speech? The British will fight to the last drop of blood . . . (*sotto voce*) of the Russian soldier!" Loyalty of spirit is a rare bird in Russia.

Even now the same mentality prevails there, except that the place of the "poor exploited Russian soldier" is taken by the "poor exploited proletarian," and the putrescence which was kept in check somehow by autocracy has now assumed the rôle of king.

I found a few ladies in the reception room. Rasputin was standing against the window, reading out of an old book. I noticed that his hands were perfectly clean, and his nails well cared for. The myth about his dirty finger-nails was just part of the campaign of the Aristocracy against him; their own idea of their position was so exalted that they almost believed they were born under supernatural laws. A peasant or a bourgeois was something vastly inferior, to be told so on every possible occasion, and made to feel the elevating superiority of the nobles' boot. This vulgar arrogance of the Russian nobles had perhaps no equal in any European country. Aristocracy being for the Russian nothing but a matter of caste and outward show, it was natural Petrograd society should attach enormous importance to manicure. Manual labour was held in the greatest horror. Even during the war no Petrograd "lady" ever stooped to do work that would soil her hands. So it was natural that the horror of Rasputin the peasant could not be complete without painting his finger-nails black.

The Staretz wore a peasant robe of fine silk. About his waist was a curious girdle, which, I was told, he only wore on very special occasions. It was made of different kinds of human hair. Devoted ladies had insisted on weaving a girdle of locks of hair sacrificed by pious women as a snub to vanity. The dark, fair, golden and white locks showed up all round the girdle. They were loosely spun and woven, while pearls and rubies in gold repoussé settings formed panels at intervals. I suppose the devoted spirit which induced these ardent souls to weave this girdle was akin to that of pious ladies who embroider slippers for their curates.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about the girdle was the lock of the Empress, which was enclosed in a sort of escutcheon, like a relic. The case was richly ornamented, and formed a cover for the buckle. It was stated that people were expected to kiss this "relic" of the Empress on greeting the Staretz, but no such ceremony ever occurred

in my presence, nor do I believe it existed outside the strange imaginations of her enemies.

The Staretz did not interrupt his reading on account of my entrance. He was reading the life of St. Seraphim, a Russian saint whose cult was in great vogue. When he came to a passage about a dream, he closed the book and began to tell us of a vision he had recently received while praying before the tomb of St. Alexander Nevski.

He had fallen into ecstasy and he seemed to be walking along a narrow road across which dark figures flitted and whirled, their huge wings suddenly flashing with silver and red gleams. He was cold, hungry and footsore. As his hopes of safety began to sink he caught the glint of golden church-domes and, rushing forward, was overjoyed to see the massive white walls of a monastery rise up before his eyes.

A white monastery on a green hillock. He had spent half his life journeying as a pilgrim from the gate of one monastery to another, up and down the tremendous plains of Holy Russia.

While he was climbing the hill a Russian *bogatyr* (a sort of Russian Knight of the Round Table), all jingling with "an iron shirt," rode through the gateway on a white horse. The monastery bells were ringing, and the monks stood in the doorway, with a gold cross uplifted in blessing. In their midst stood the Little Father, clad in his coronation robes, and holding a tabernacle shaped like the church of St. Sophia at Tsargrad (Constantinople). The pilgrims and worshippers were singing "*Kol slaven*" (How glorious is the Lord), the brotherhood hymn of the Slavs. Suddenly a band of Turks and Germans dashed up the hillside to slay the *bogatyr*. After a great struggle the *bogatyr* conquered, and returned in triumph to the monastery. Here, however, in the very hour of victory, a company of visitors, kindly housed by the good monks in the pilgrims' hostel, drugged the victory wine and tried to poison the Tsar and his holy people. The plot was discovered by Rasputin

himself. He was moved to give some wine to a couple of dogs who had followed the *bogatyr* and were trampled on in the fray. They no sooner tasted the wine than they fell down dead.

The Staretz related this vision with wonderful simplicity, yet with such fine, deep intonations and imagery that he seemed to me like a medieval figure from the pages of Chaucer.

Countess Klinmel immediately began to interpret the vision. It meant that the Turks and Germans were not the real foes of Russia, but that it was necessary to drive out the foreign plotters—"the English and French," she declared, ignoring my presence, or delighting to get a cheap thrust home against the hated Allies.

"Lloyd George is the man who will poison the victory wine," she proclaimed. "Don't believe promises. We shall never get Constantinople. A box of Turkish delight is all we shall get for all our ocean of Russian blood."

This Baltic-German lady always showed a remarkable love for the poor Russian fighting man, and never ceased defending him against "exploitation" by the Allies. With the Army Staffs, bureaucracy, and society overrun by Baltic-Germans, the Tsar had a whole army of pro-German agents to contend with at home.

Countess Klinmel did not stay long. Her purpose had probably been fulfilled, and she left with one of the ladies. The two remaining set about preparing tea. They went into an outer room, and insisted on relieving the servant of the task of heating the charcoal for the samovar and laying the cloth.

Their willing service, reminiscent of Martha in the Gospel story, gave me a chance to question Rasputin on several points.

As the protector of Orthodox interests, Russia could not help being in conflict with those of the Roman Church, especially in Poland and Galicia. The question of the

bishoprics of Lemberg, Kholm and Lyublin was a burning one. English Romanists were using the weight of British prestige and diplomacy to further the interests of the Roman Church.

With a deprecating ring in his voice, he told me that the Empress had been "abused" (*rugali*) by the British Foreign Office on account of Archbishop Szepticky of Lemberg, a notorious anti-Russian, Ukrainian Austrian Pole, who had been deported from Galicia by the Russian Army Staff on account of his inflammatory political speeches. It appeared that influential British Roman Catholics resented this.

The Empress was greatly annoyed at this interference in Russian affairs, especially on behalf of a man who was Russia's avowed enemy and determined to raise difficulties in the rear of the victorious Russian Army. She could not understand why England should voice the claims of the Roman Curia when the Catholic countries were silent.

With regard to religion, Rasputin declared that science was a failure, because it had finite means and ways and could not deal "with the Endless Great and the Endless Small. People thought of God too much like a scholar's sum. They were always looking for the tiniest atom or the greatest world. They forgot that God was the Endless Small as well as the Endless Great, and could not be measured."

Apart from his saga-like eloquence and rich, poetic visions, his stalwart physique and velvet toned "breasty" voice, he did not strike me as being more mystic than other Startzy I had met. At times he struck me as being very much like an Old Testament prophet. I think the secret of his power lay in the sense of calm, gentle strength and shining warmth of conviction. He considered the Russian nation as God's chosen people and the Tsar as God's Anointed, whose task was to restore the Cross to St. Sophia.

II

The samovar was brought in by Countess Rusov and placed on the end of the dining table. The chairs were being drawn up in readiness for the guests when the door bell rang. Two veiled ladies entered. They were both modestly attired in simple black dresses, a fur toque covering their heads. The Staretz moved forward to greet them, saying gently :

“ Greeting to Alexandra, the servant of God.”

Throwing off her dark veil, the tall lady stood revealed. It was the Empress. I was astonished beyond words. With her was the Grand Duchess Tatiana, tall, elegant and beautiful in her simple black dress.

I could not help noticing the reverence the Empress showed towards the Staretz. There was a look of religious peace and happiness in her eyes as she returned the Staretz' greeting and, lifting the gold cross he wore on a chain, pressed her lips to it with tender piety. I felt dreadfully embarrassed, and hardly knew what to do. My first thoughts were of flight. I felt sure my presence must be irksome to the Empress, who had probably come to the flat under the impression that only the two ladies in waiting would be present.

The Empress, however, put me at ease immediately. I had already had the honour of being presented to her during her visit to Kharkov in the early days of the war, when she visited the Red Cross Depôt at the House of the Nobility. Furthermore, she was aware of my association with the Grand Duke Oleg, who was killed at the front. Her Majesty had taken a personal interest in the projects of her young relation.

“ I feel sure you will appreciate the beauty of our friend's character,” she said, taking the hard chair I drew up for her convenience (there was no sign of luxury in the flat. Nothing but bare, painted boards, hard deal chairs and a

simple table). "It is so refreshing to me. If we are true Christians we must love simplicity. Our friend takes one back to the simple faith of the early Christians, when high and low met together to hear the Word of God from a poor fisherman. The Spirit breathes where it will."

I ventured to state the platitude that God was no respecter of persons.

"If people would only bear that in mind!" she exclaimed. I could not help noticing the sad look that crossed her face, as though she saw before her mind's eye some disheartening tragedy. Her skin was very red, the complexion beginning to get streaky.

I was very much startled when, with blunt directness and forceful emphasis, she declared:

"Petrograd society is rotten! There is hardly a soul to be relied upon."

The Staretz was busy talking to the Grand Duchess Tatiana. I caught snatches of their conversation about helping the soldiers with clothing and comforts.

Finding my views reasonable, and probably because of my connection with the political and other projects of the Grand Duke Oleg, the Empress told me some of her views about the great problem she had at heart. After the 1905 Revolution she had come to realise that the security of the Throne and Russia could only be assured by a closer knitting together of Tsar and peasantry. The work of past emperors had been too Western, imposing a culture which had merely led to nihilism and atheism. The nobles and merchants were "rotten." They had lost faith and worshipped materialism. They were untrustworthy, anarchical, evil-living.

I was aware of a deep meaning when she said: "Even the highest and nearest are full of revolt and schemes."

Rasputin was to tell me afterwards that the Tsar lived in daily dread of being the victim of a plot to dethrone him by several of the more ambitious Grand Dukes. Russian

history, no doubt, furnished him with plenty of cause for anxiety. The world had been openly talking of the chances of the Grand Duke Nicholas. He was the idol of the Army, and was credited with a strong dislike of the Emperor's pro-peasant policy. Rasputin actually attributed half the propaganda against himself to him.

The Empress appeared to be very earnest in her desire to secure for her son a firm place in the hearts of the people.

"All my thoughts are for him," she assured me. "He is to be the Autocrat of Russia and defender of the Orthodox religion. He must be the leader of those who are faithful to the Church and Throne. The middle class is rotten. It is in love with revolution. That is all bad blood. It can never be got out of the body. It is doomed to die. The upper classes are rotten, too. There is hardly anyone who can be relied on. If Russia is to be saved we must look to the simple peasants."

Her Majesty paid a compliment to the English language.

"All my sweetest thoughts are in my mother's tongue. Nothing can equal the beautiful English books for children. I always read to my son in English. He adores English story books."

By this time tea was prepared. The Staretz begged the Empress to sit at table next to the bright, hissing samovar. Princess Olensky, one of the ladies in waiting, poured a few drops of weak tea into a glass fixed in a silver holder. The Empress took the glass and filled it with hot water from the spout of the samovar. Rasputin passed to her a bowl of mountain ash jam. Of this syrup the Empress took a spoonful and plunged it into the pale tea. On a hardware plate in the centre of the table was a small pile of rusks. The Empress took one and dipped it in her tea before eating it.

I could not imagine anything more democratic and withal so full of simple dignity and grace. The Empress seemed infinitely happy, calm and restful in those plain, quiet,

surroundings. It occurred to me at the time that there was indeed an atmosphere of the catacombs of early Christian days. The Empress seemed to enjoy the same sense of refreshment, joy and renewal that must have come to some new convert of Imperial Rome seeking relief from the stress of barren Court life among the homely secret assemblies of the Christians beneath the floor of Rome. I thought, too, of Marie Antoinette and her milkmaid's life at the Trianon, though the Empress was stirred by a mystic passion to serve God and Russia. In conversation with my neighbour, Princess Olenky, I learnt that there was going to be a little private conference between the Empress and Rasputin, so I took this as a hint that my presence was awkward. Needless to say, I soon found an excuse for leaving.

The Empress was so kind as to invite me to go to the Hospital in Tsarskoe Selo, where I should have an opportunity of seeing her work for the wounded.

"The people must know that the Throne also has a heart and can share their sufferings," was her last remark.

It was typical of that gentle soul. Yet all the reward she received from the "aristocrats" of Petrograd was a constant stream of reviling.

"That horrible German!" they would say. "She is degrading Autocracy in the eyes of the people. Imagine an Empress nursing wounded soldiers with her own hands!" This parrot cry was heard day after day.

Likewise her desire to reach the religious soul of the Russian people was reviled and deluged by these pretentious nobles with an orgy of calumnies. No doubt they felt they were being passed by, and that their position as knout-wielders to the populace was being undermined.

CHAPTER VI

THE FATAL CREEDS

I

LIVING in the neighbourhood of Rasputin, I had ample means for studying his views and observing his manners. Very often I accepted an invitation to tea at his flat or at the house of a fashionable lady who admired him.

Of all the wretched stories that were told about him, I could believe none, for there was not the slightest evidence in the man's behaviour either at the Court or in the houses of his admirers to justify any suspicion of evil-doing. One has only to recall the base, disloyal, and abominably lurid stories about the Empress and her beautiful daughters—which the degenerate bureaucratic classes invented out of sheer malice and rank imaginativeness, to realise how low society had sunk.

In a land of bribe-takers, robbers of State funds, and corrupt officials, Rasputin stood out like the giant figure of a saint moulded in rugged iron. He, of all men in Russia, was immaculate. Not even his worst enemies could accuse him of taking bribes, although he was besieged by men and women with glittering offerings in their hands. He lived a poor and simple life. Such virtue was almost unknown in Russia. Besides, Russians would never have admitted it. They had no belief in any virtue, no will even to believe.

Rasputin's life in the midst of a horde of howling, snarling enemies was both dangerous and burdensome. The infuriated aristocrats longed to have him assassinated, while a Grand Duke openly declared he would hang him if he got the chance.

One day I met Rasputin in the park at Tsarskoe Selo. He was hurrying along, looking rather gloomy and pre-occupied. I called out to him. He turned and looked anxiously in my direction. Recognising me, he seemed relieved and came forward to meet me.

"The sun is going down on the golden domes of Holy Russia," he said dismally.

As the sun had not reached midday, I realised he was parabolic as usual.

He explained to me that a plot had been set afoot by some Grand Dukes to have him removed from the Court. He repeated his assurance that the throne would be ruined if he was sent away.

"Already the Tsarevitch has sickened," he said. "I fear lest he should get dangerously ill and die. The Empress has shed many tears over her seraphim-pure child. Wicked enemies are plotting to bring death upon him. The Grand Duke Nicholas and the Grand Duke Michael are plotting to remove the Tsar and his son and take the throne. The Romanoffs! They talk of keeping Russia for the Romanoffs. They say the Tsar is too weak to rule Holy Russia. They hate the Tsarina. They say the Tsarevitch is a sick child and will never be fit to rule, and that he should not live to marry and pass on his illness to coming Tsars."

He told me that the Tsar and Tsarina were very much disturbed by the insulting behaviour of one of the Grand Dukes. The Empress had done all she could to allay her husband's fears. Nevertheless, they were certain a plot was being formed to remove them from the throne. They had received news that the Grand Dukes Nicholas and Michael were in communication with certain influential Constitutional Democrats, who were anxious to set up a constitutional monarchy. The plotters considered the reputation of the Grand Duke Nicholas with the army sufficient to assure its adhesion. The Tsar and his wife were being accused of planning a separate peace with

Germany. This was also part of the campaign to turn popular sentiment against them. They were to be deposed, and the army and country rallied to a successful prosecution of the war under a Constitutional Monarch. The Tsar had received information that the British and French ambassadors were aware of the plot, and had assured the schemers of their moral and financial support.

Some days later I saw Rasputin at the house of a princess in Tsarskoe Selo. He seemed quite re-assured, and withdrew after a chat with the visitors into a small room, where he received people privately, and listened to their pleas for help. When the audience was finished, he returned and sat down with the rest of the guests at the tea-table.

In conversation with him, I gathered his mind was no longer exercised by the danger of a plot. It had evidently failed for the present. He told me, instead, about his wife and children. He had a great love for them and wished to bring them to Petrograd. One of his daughters was very clever and wished to be educated. The Empress wished to send her to the Smolny Institute for young ladies, but the directress, a Princess Leven, was such a snob that she refused to accede to the Empress's request.

Rasputin did not seem to mind. He took the refusal calmly.

"These people will ruin Russia," he said. "They hate the Russian peasant like cattle. They are not Russians. They are Germans. They speak our tongue and cross themselves in the orthodox manner, but their hearts are German."

Perhaps the trouble of Rasputin's life was the stupid manner of certain neurotic women. They sang his praises in a strident chorus, and thought no act of admiration too trivial. At the Imperial chapel in Tsarskoe, I once saw a lean hysterical princess reverently pick up a clod of dry mud that had fallen from the Staretz's boot as he walked in. She placed it in a scented silk handkerchief and kissed

it like a relic. The legend of its powers grew among the cooks and housemaids of the neighbourhood, and various people claimed to have been restored to health through its powers.

There was also a Roman Catholic Polish Countess who took up the cult of the Staretz with all the traditional exuberance and elegance of her race. She set up an altar in her house, embroidering the frontal with her own hand. Red lights in silver lamps lavishly adorned with scintillating gems hung before a gilt shrine with painted carvings of plump-cheeked cherubs and curling leaves.

Inside the shrine lay a dirty shirt and some rusty, blood-stained iron bands which Rasputin was said to have worn in the early days of his quest for miraculous sanctity. The enthusiastic Countess loved to relate how she journeyed to Rasputin's native village in Siberia, and spent three days begging his wife to part with the precious relics.

At first the fanatical woman kept a consecrated wafer in the shrine. She got it from the local Roman Catholic church, having gone to communion and taken the host from her mouth with her handkerchief. To satisfy her Rococo religiosity, she used to bake small wafers stamped with a crude image of Rasputin. She would give them to peasants and superstitious people, telling them they would receive a great joy if they consumed a wafer with prayer and fasting on nine consecutive days.

Her joy was unbounded when she discovered a suspended Polish Roman Catholic priest, whom she paid generously to celebrate Mass at the altar before her shrine.

Many of the doings attributed to her reminded one of the Messes Noires of the French Abbes of the eighteenth century. Of such things I had no personal knowledge, while Rasputin seems to have been unaware even of the extravagances I have just mentioned. The stories of the occult attaching to him naturally attracted a good number of weird individuals, with whom he had nothing in common

On the whole, I found him a pleasant man to converse with. Although a peasant, he had clear, well defined ideas on a host of matters. No doubt they sprang more from a deep intuition and instinct rather than from a reasoned, scientific knowledge. There was so much of the Old Testament prophet in Rasputin that it may not be wrong to compare him to one of those strange, rugged seers who played so great a rôle at the courts of the kings of Israel. He had a wealth of pleasant imagery, taken chiefly from nature and rich lore of the Eastern church. It was at least strange that this man should be able to impress the Empress and a good number of highly educated people with his personality. What his conduct was outside their circle, it is impossible to judge, for the men who were ordered to draw up a report to the Tsar contradicted their own statements.

II

How, then, did Rasputin come to hold such a position in the eyes of the Tsar and Tsarina? The answer is quite simple. He fitted in with their creed and plan for the regeneration and salvation of Russia.

More than once I was privileged to talk with the Tsarina. Princess Galsin took me many times to the hospital in Tsarskoe where the Empress delighted to perform the simple and arduous tasks of a sister of charity. God alone knows the amount of abuse that was heaped upon her poor head for rendering these simple offices. The selfish, intriguing courtiers and aristocrats could not find words strong enough to express their outraged feelings. How often I heard pampered, overfed Counts and Princes relieve their feelings on the subject.

"Isn't it wicked of that German Alice to betray the Russian autocrat in this vulgar manner?" they would say. "She doesn't understand what the Russian peasant or

worker is like. They have to look up to the throne as something glorious and powerful, but the Tsarina is degrading it and dragging it down to their level. Just think! She even dares to bind the wounds of the soldiers in the hospital with her own hands! She is ruining the reputation of the throne!"

Of course I knew nothing was more horrible and degrading in the eyes of the Petrograd Russian aristocracy than manual work. Even during the worst days of the war, when wounded soldiers were pouring into Petrograd, few women of the aristocracy were courageous enough to take on the actual work of nursing. Most of them had private hospitals where "middle class" sisters did the work, while they contented themselves with sewing gas masks and garments, and carrying on the old gay life. Even the motor car of the British Red Cross Mission was used by a Russian Princess, and secured the reputation of being more in the service of the revellers than of the wounded. When Russian women of the upper classes saw photographs of English noblewomen doing hard manual labour they were filled with contempt.

Such an attitude was due to the extravagantly exalted and pretentious views the Russian aristocracy held concerning its own value and position. No wonder that some noble souls among them are occasionally driven to adopt Revolution as a creed and disillusioned, surfeited souls like Tolstoy to embrace the simple, despised life of the peasant!

With such intolerant and selfish views prevailing among the upper classes, the creed and plan of the Sovereigns was sure to meet with the most hostile and vindictive opposition.

Certain Grand Dukes, well aware of Russia's past history and the opportunities of the present, lent their support to the campaign against the Tsar and Tsarina. There was a chance to ascend the throne if the Tsar was deposed. The past century and a half had witnessed more than one

instance. The revolutionary intelligentsia were glad of any chance to undermine the throne. They lived entirely for Revolution, if only as an idea.

By their opposition to the Tsar's new policy, the nobles were digging their own grave. They little realised what they were doing. At the time they imagined they were bolstering up their position as the mainstay of the autocratic régime, which had given them and assured their possession of the land.

In the Tsar's rapprochement with the peasantry, they descried a menace to their hold on the land. Moreover, by identifying themselves personally with the peasants' religion, the Sovereigns appeared to be turning aside from the materialism and spiritual nihilism of the nobles and intelligentsia.

From my acquaintance with Prince Oleg, the Empress knew I took a lively interest in Russian ethical and political matters. Once at a little gathering in Tsarskoe, at which the Staretz presided, the Tsarina unfolded to me her hopes and fears for the future and safety of Russia. She told me that since the revolution of 1905, she and her Imperial husband had come to realise that the cause of all Russia's misfortunes, lay in the apostasy of the educated classes from the ideals of religion and morality. They were unfit to lead the peasants who formed the overwhelming majority of the nation. They were Voltairians, who were unconsciously perverting the moral sense of the nation.

It was necessary that the peasants and workers should know the throne stood for them as Russians, and not as an armed power, to secure the dominations of landowners and bureaucrats of foreign extraction, who despised the natives.

With a peculiar tone of indignation which may have been due to her German upbringing, the Empress told me how difficult it had been for the Emperor to get the aristocracy to accept his Pan-Russian policy. The Grand Dukes

clung to the old Prussian tradition and resented any compromise with "the Moscow spirit." Most of all the Empress was indignant with the Baltic barons, who were practically supreme in Court circles and the offices of Government.

"They are Russian subjects," the Empress declared. "But you can hardly imagine how intensely they hate everything that is really Russian. I, myself, am very proud my dear mother was an English princess, but I have grown to love my adopted country with all my heart. It is the land my darling son will rule one day by God's will, and I want him to be a ruler after the heart of the people."

She related how the Emperor was determined to make himself one with the Russian people. An incident, which had given him great pain, took place at Riga just before the outbreak of the War. He had gone there to unveil a monument to Peter the Great. In his speech he begged his Baltic subjects not only to be actual subjects of Russia, but to feel themselves to be Russians.

The same night the Baltic barons held a meeting in the Hall of the Nobility, and Baron Manteufel declared that, for the Tsar of Russia to ask them to feel themselves to be Russians, was almost the same as asking a man, who had spent a night in a stable, to feel himself to be a horse.

The Tsarina could not suppress her indignation. She felt sure the Russians would never get better if they were made constantly to feel how inferior they were, and never given a chance to be guided in the right manner. She was certain there was a wealth of goodness lying dormant and neglected in the Russian religion, and also in the Russian character. She spoke with admiration of the good work which the Grand Duchess Elizabeth was carrying on at her convent of mercy in Moscow.

"It is just such work that Russia needs," she said. "With our knowledge of Western character and our prestige we shall be able to infuse a new and freshening spirit into the Russian church. The educated classes neglect these things

for the material conquests of science. They are quite wrong. Russia's soul is sick to death. They forget the West has kept pace spiritually, and in its religion, with the advance of science. The Russian intelligentsia makes a god of materialism and science, and despises the secrets of religion. It is false! Their science will only lead to the shedding of oceans of blood, if they despise God."

I could not help remarking how thoroughly convinced the Empress was in the rightness of her mission, although I sympathised with Baron Manteufel. To my mind the Empress might have fared better if she had recognised the realistic truth of his words.

It is curious to note that the Tsarina, who was accused of being haughtily contemptuous of Russians at the time of her marriage, owed much of her later woe to her sincere desire to be Russian through and through. The same voices accused her each time.

Rasputin entered her life because she wished to be one with the religion of the peasants. She cared for the wounded with her own hands, because she wished to share the sufferings of her people in the War. With her husband she was zealous in celebrating the historical triumphs of the Russian nation, and strengthening it in its consciousness and belief in itself.

But on all these counts her efforts were met with an ocean of calumny, hatred and abuse.

Why? Partly because the cleavage between the political groups was too vast and diametrically opposed. The nobles stood for a system of autocracy, that should oppose all progress at their expense and rule the land in the old traditional tyranny of Tsardom. "The Russians are not fit for freedom or a constitution. The Tsardom is the only government fit for Russia." Such was the usual plea of the nobles.

The intelligentsia lived only for Revolution and Socialism. In their childish, "scientific" way of thinking, with no

practical experience of political freedom, they expected to transplant the most highly developed Western system to the bleak steppes of Russia. The Tsardom must go at all costs.

It was between these two wooden stools that the Empress was doomed to fall. The more daring and ambitious of the Grand Dukes saw their opportunity to gain the throne. They, too, lent their aid to the campaign against the Tsarina.

The intelligentsia wanted the Revolution at all costs; the nobles wanted the throne to uphold its prestige, and their position as batteners on the land. Nothing was too bad or wicked to attribute to the Tsarina. All the evils that afflicted Russia were laid at her door. The nobles endeavoured to turn popular anger, due to their own corruption and mismanagement, against the Empress, in order that the Tsar might not be affected. The defeats in the War were attributed to her. The story was put about, up and down the whole length of Russia, that the Tsarina had a special wire from Tsarskoe to the Kaiser in Potsdam. The whole thing was an utter impossibility, since even the generals at the front couldn't maintain their telegraphic communications with one another, but millions believed the story.

In a like manner the troubles of the country were attributed to Rasputin. Perhaps none was more pleased with the presence of the Staretz at Court than the Revolutionaries. They revelled in the most hideous stories about him, maliciously enjoying the political profit they derived from them. Anything was lawful in order to bring about the downfall of the throne, and bring about that glorious, long sighed for illusion, the Revolution.

There was but a handful of loyal people in Russia. The millions of peasants were voiceless, although the Empress received many thousands of letters from those at least who could write, thanking her for her personal care for the wounded.

When I heard the Empress use the phrase "Russia is rotten," I was somewhat startled, but it soon became evident her words were literally true. The Grand Dukes and the rich factory owners were intriguing for a "bloodless Revolution." The Empress knew of it and was full of anxiety. The most constant phrase that came to her lips was, "Can we trust anybody?"

The constant changes of ministers was largely due to this fear. Were they working with the plotters? The Emperor especially feared the influence of the Grand Duke Nicholas, who was very popular with the army, and was being represented as a martyr to Rasputin and the Empress. The army was said to adore him and to be willing to die for him. The Grand Duke had resented his removal from the position of Commander-in-Chief of the Russian army. Realising his value as a political asset, some influential, wealthy men of the Constitutional Democratic Party, asked him whether it would not be possible to bring about a bloodless revolution, by using his influence with the army.

I do not know what the Grand Duke thought of this. The plot, however, seems to have grown and entered upon more daring lines.

Rasputin was aware of the intrigue, but he mentioned to me the names of the Grand Duke Michael, Goutchkoff, several factory owners, and the Jewish banker, Rubenstein. He did not trouble much about the matter. What pleased him most was the fact that Prince Usouppoff, and several other well known people, had promised him their support, declaring that they realised the regeneration and safety of Russia could only come through the renewal of its religious life.

I was surprised at this announcement, because I knew a good deal about the mode of life of these princely individuals. Rasputin, however, seemed flattered, and thought that he was at last beating down the fierce opposition, which he had braved so powerfully at the risk of his life.

I last saw him in the beginning of December 1916. I was leaving for England for a few weeks. When I took leave of him he made me a strange request. He asked me to bring back a lock of Queen Mary and her daughter's hair. He wanted to add these royal locks to those of the Tsarina and her daughters, in the girdle of woven hair he wore on great festivals. He was dismally disappointed when I told him it was beyond all hopes. He then asked me to bring him back an ikon from the most famous monastery in England. Thinking of a picture of St. Edward of Westminster, I promised to do so.

When I returned in January 1917, the Staretz was no more. His princely "converts" had lured him to his death, and talk of Revolution was in the air.

I cannot help reflecting how futile the Russians were. The nobles, who feared the Tsar's rapprochement with the peasants, have had their land taken from them, while the Revolutionary intelligentsia, whose dream of the downfall of Tsardom was so glorious and stirring, have bitten the dust under the blows of a bloodier knout, or are scattered over the face of their loveless West.

CHAPTER VII

A PAGE OF HIGH LIFE

I

EVERYBODY knew Count Sherevalov. His name rang in the ears of Russians like a solid, old-fashioned coin of the realm. There was a sound of mellow antiquity about it, not more than two hundred years, perhaps, but glorious enough to captivate the sentimental ear. In a land where nihilism went hand in hand with the basest flunkeyism, Count Sherevalov's name was as mighty as that of Revolution, for his wealth was untold.

Palatial residences in Petrograd and Moscow, superb estates and country mansions up and down the broad length of Russia, sumptuous villas in Finland, the Crimea and on the Riviera, a magnificent yacht, a string of high-sounding appointments at Court, a mania for English smartness, a colossal orchestra, a personal fire-brigade, such were a few of the things that came to mind at the mention of his name.

Yet with all his wealth of pomp and power, Count Sherevalov was an unhappy, restless man. If all the world's a stage, it was lamentably too small for Count Sherevalov. His ideas were immense.

Sitting at the head of his luncheon table in the grim, dark, wainscotted dining-room of his Petrograd mansion, he confided a few of his troubles to his guests.

It was a Sunday in April 1916. The cream of Petrograd Society had assembled in the Count's private chapel for mass and many stayed to luncheon. As for myself, I had received an invitation to join the table party.

To look at, Count Sherevalov was decidedly agreeable. He had an English atmosphere of cleanliness, a spruceness which distinguished him from other men of his age. He was bordering on sixty, yet not a single grey hair streaked the glossy perfection of his well-kempt head.

His manner as a host was most genial. With gentle persistence he induced his neighbours to have their fill of all the costly delicacies that were served at his table by grandiose menservants. His delight in gastronomic operations was as rich as the ardour with which he described the succulence of each dish. His voice was full, his manner pontifical.

"*Prenez encore du caviare !*" he would urge one, helping himself to his tenth portion. "*C'est le meilleur qu'il y ait dans toute la Russie. Tout le monde connaît ma table. L'on en parle dans toutes les Cours du monde. Elle est plus puissante que tout ambassadeur. Irrésistible ! Irrésistible !*"

His eyes would sparkle with triumphant good humour, as he squeezed his lemon-slice on the juicy, black roe, and popped it with a morsel of bread into his spacious mouth.

"Have you heard my orchestra?" he would ask. Everyone had to confess he had.

He would thump the table with his fist.

"It's world famous!" he would assure you. Then he would wag his head rather disconsolately, adding:

"But the music we have to play is poor. It's out of date! Out of date, I declare to you!"

Here he would thump the table with double emphasis. In my case I received the declaration with a diplomatic regret for the lack of first-rate modern composers.

"That's it!" he replied eagerly. Then gobbling down a choice piece of sturgeon, and draining a glass of old madeira, he laid his hand, glittering with an enormous diamond ring, on my arm.

"That's it, my dear sir!" he went on, dropping his voice to a quiet confidential tone. "The old ones are out of date

and the new haven't yet arrived. Voilà! So I have had to compose for myself"

Once again the mournful look stole over his eyes.

"But it's no good!" he went on, piling his plate with a veritable parterre of hors d'œuvres. "Take my Mass for instance! Is there anything in the world to rival it for loftiness of conception, soundness of rhythm and sublimity of sentiment? I had it performed here at the Polish Church on the Nevsky Prospect, but what a dismal place for such a work! My beautiful music needs scope, and a grand setting! Scope! you understand? Why, St. Peter's at Rome would be too small!"

I agreed without a scruple. From his description I gathered that only the scope of the spheres would suit his sublime harmonies.

Of his admirable wife, I have only bright memories. She was one of the rare Russians who had a sense of social duty. In fact, she was hardly a Russian, being of Dutch descent and very proud of it. Like most descendants of the Dutch, German and other foreigners brought to civilise Russia by Peter the Great and Catherine II, she retained a vast contempt for the aboriginal Russian. Her foreign blood was a saving link with the culture of Europe. True, she spoke Russian as her mother tongue. Only fifty years before, the foreign aristocracy had despised that language. But it had since come into its own, although a consciousness of contempt for the race still predominated. To the aristocracy, Russia produced only evil smelling moujhiks and rent. All good things came from the West. Nowhere in Russia was this sense of hostility to the native Russian so apparent as in Petrograd, a town which the Muscovites always looked upon as predominantly foreign in spirit and manner. It was indeed a European town built on the miasmatic marsh of Russia. The light coming through this eye into Europe rarely got beyond it. If it did, the swamp of the Mongols soon absorbed it. In Countess Sherevalov, however, it shone resplendently.

She had striven to infuse its spirit into Russian life, even into the lethargic life of the Orthodox Church. If there had been more people with her character, there would have been less decay in society.

Unfortunately she was handicapped by the overwhelming change in people's views. She stood for the old idea of the Court and Society, namely, to serve as a channel for the infusion of the best European culture into the veins of backward Russia. Since the Revolution of 1905, she had had to face the downfall and eclipse of the old lights. A wave of intense nationalism had swept the country. With a few literary masterpieces, containing nothing fit to keep a crumbling society on its legs, a row of good painters, a school of music, and a corps de ballet, mostly all produced by men of foreign extraction, Russians had at last something to make them proud of themselves. It became the fashion of the old Kultur-träger of Russia to identify themselves more and more with a national spirit. Even the Empress had succumbed to this movement, endeavouring to rescue it for the peasant, and Orthodoxy from the revolutionary materialism of the intelligentsia.

In the midst of these currents, Countess Sherevalov stood like a deserted island. The Empress was betraying the prestige of the throne to the ignorant moujrik (such was her honest opinion), while the National Russian movement led only to the triumph of the undying Mongol, orgiastic anarchy and nihilism.

Countess Sherevalov represented the tradition that wealth and position are not everything, that duty and good example are the first obligations of leaders of society. Unfortunately for her ideas, she was doomed to see her children sink under the Mongol wave.

Her splendid example compelled admiration. The only bit of gossip that gained credence was connected with the colour of her hair. It was fine and fair. By normal rules it should have been grey at her age. It was said that her

opposition to Rasputin was overcome through her love for her beautiful tresses. As one of the leaders of the superior aristocracy with foreign blood, she had vigorously opposed the presence of the Russian peasant at Court.

One day a terrible thing happened. She was giving a large dinner party at her sumptuous house. Everything went well. The foreign diplomatic and military officers were enchanted with her brilliance both as a hostess and a woman. Her crowning glory, surmounted by a costly diamond tiara, was particularly admired. The horror of Rasputin had made her eloquent and witty, relating anecdotes about his social blunders.

After dinner, she led her guests down the marble staircase to the cosy drawing-room on the ground floor. It is said that when she reached the foot of the staircase, she turned to a well-known diplomat and was about to speak, but the words fell dead on her open lips. She had caught sight of her hair in the hall mirror. It was greenish-purple!

A sudden indisposition flew to her rescue and she retired to her room, leaving her guests to the company of her megalomaniac husband.

A few days later, Rasputin is said to have been startled by having a veiled visitor ushered into his presence. It was the Countess Sherevalov, come to offer him her support.

This sudden change of front was duly explained by the tongues of society. Countess Sherevalov gloried in her golden hair. No doubt many a less favoured woman had eaten out her heart with envy. It was explained that this glory would have died a natural death, had the Countess not kept it alive with a German dye. Since the war broke out, her supply of this valuable liquid had got very low. At last, on the fatal night of the dinner party, it had given out entirely, and she had been obliged to use something made in Russia. The result was the terrible shock at the foot of the grand staircase. The blazing diamonds of her tiara are said to have turned sickly green. As Rasputin was popularly

supposed to be working for a separate peace with Germany, she was said to have joined his party in order that the war might be quickly ended and her stock of hair dye replenished.

Whether this was true or not, I never ventured to ask Countess Sherevalov. Her hair was her own, in any case, and so were her opinions.

II

Now, the tragedy of Countess Sherevalov's life had less to do with her hair than with her daughters. She had two, Tamara and Nathalie. Both of these ladies tried to write a chapter in my life. I will begin with Tamara.

I first heard about her from the lips of her father. Count Sherevalov invited me one day to dinner. We were sitting over the liqueurs when a clanging bell resounded in the court yard. Like a stung man, my host sprang up and rushed out of the room. I thought a terrible crime was being committed. Noticing my surprise, the butler came and explained the flight of the Count.

"It often happens," he said with an amused grin on his pale face. "We've got used to it. He, he! His Lordship is like a raving bull when that bell rings. Ting, ting! and off he darts; the devil take the hindmost!"

"What bell is it?" I asked.

"The fire-brigade bell. Haven't you seen his Lordship's own fire brigade? Come and look. They're getting ready to dash out to a fire in the city."

He led me down a corridor to a small window overlooking the inner courtyard of the mansion. A terrible ado was going forward. Liveried men in shining brass helmets were darting helter-skelter around an imposing fire-engine, wreathed in strings of white hose pipes and water buckets. On the side of the engine gleamed the brilliant gold coat of arms of Count Sherevalov, who sat on the box clad in belt and helmet, and flourishing a hatchet. When the horses were

duly harnessed, the street gates were flung open, and the great equipage rushed out, clanging its alarm bell with all the zest of the Awakening Angel.

For two long hours I waited the return of my host. The butler told me of dangerous fires in which the Count had assisted. Often in the middle of the night, he would rush out with his brigade to put out a fire. He was connected by telephone with all the fire stations of the town. The Countess had grown accustomed to this mania of her husband's, but in the beginning it had put a hard strain on her endurance. In fact, the constant and sudden calls during the night had led to a separation in the ménage, especially as the ancient question of the anxious spouse, "Where have you been?" was always met with the reply: "To put out a fire." Which served very well until it was accidentally discovered one night that the gallant fireman had forgotten to take the fire-engine with him. This the butler told me in strict confidence, with a wink.

When Count Sherevalov returned from the fire, he offered his excuses for the sudden interruption, and calmly finished his glass of Chartreuse.

"Why didn't you come?" he asked. "There was plenty of room on the engine and the show was a good one. Lord, how we made the people stare as we galloped down the Liteiny Prospect. A maddening joy! What's life without something to stir it up?"

He gulped down another glassful of Chartreuse and lit a cigar.

"There's nothing like a fire to try a man's courage," he continued. "I found a husband for my daughter in that way, Tamara. Have you seen her? A splendid girl. She's helping the English Red Cross Mission. A fine time. Well, I married her off to a fellow who took my fancy. There were plenty of men after her hand. She had the biggest fortune in Russia and a father that was a credit to her. But I didn't care for any of them. Then one night

I had this man sitting with me as you are now and the bell rang. I bolted off to the fire as usual. When I finished putting it out—it was only a bit of a shed outside Petrograd—I found this man among the brigade. He'd been as hard at work as the rest of them. I vowed on the spot there was no other man fit to be my son-in-law. I shook him by the hand, and said to him, 'I'm proud of you, Tripoff. A man with the sporting instinct like that is the only one for Tamara. I know the blood. She takes after her father. We'll marry you to her at once!' Said, done. Tamara took to him like a duck takes to water. Noo! . . . "

He snapped off his story with this exclamation of anger and disappointment.

I gathered that the gallant husband had turned out a failure. Dashing work on a fire-engine is no proof of a capacity for matrimonial success. Not all the riches of the heiress sufficed to make the path of home-life smooth.

Count Sherevalov was loath to speak about the venture.

"It lasted about five years, and then the bubble burst," he said, wagging his head. "Divorce, and the present holy alliance. Charming man, according to Tamara. Age twenty-five—when she married him—and a Liberal (in Russia a reformist). . . . "

He thumped the table with his fist so that the silver vases filled with costly orchids began to dance precariously.

"No damned Liberals for me, sir!" he shouted. "Autocracy was what my forefathers stood for and Autocracy is what I stand for! Russia without Autocracy! Hell and the devil let loose, sir! Hell and the devil let loose, sir!"

He reddened almost to the verge of apoplexy and brought his fist down on the table with so terrific a blow that the silver vases overturned and a plate flew on to the floor and smashed.

The butler darted at once to restore order.

"Ivan!" Count Sherevalov called out. "If that cursed

son-in-law of mine shows his nose at my door, chuck him out ! ”

He pointed to the golden ikon glimmering in a corner of the room, and then to the door.

“ There’s God and there’s the door ! Tell him that ! ”

(“ *Vot Bog, vot porog* ” ; a Russian proverb quoted to undesirable visitors.)

I was somewhat taken aback by this exhibition of futile fury in what passed for and proclaimed itself “ the most aristocratic house in Russia.” Count Sherevalov himself probably realised he had satisfied his heart enough in the presence of a guest and reverted to a calm, unctuous French. His suavity was so refined that any lady would have termed his manner “ most charming.”

A little later Countess Sherevalov returned from the Opera and put an end to our *tête-à-tête*.

III

Some months later, in August 1916, I went to pass a week or so at one of Count Sherevalov’s estates. It was situated in the Government of Smolensk. The mansion was beautifully perched on top of a round hillock and overlooked a broad stretch of meadow land, forests and corn-fields. It was a good imitation of an English Georgian house with ample corridors and spacious rooms. Like most country houses of the larger type it had a melancholy atmosphere of isolation from the world of culture. For tens of miles around were fields and forests and straggling villages of wooden huts. Here and there on the horizon gleamed the white tower and green cupola of a village church, but even that indicated nothing more than the presence of a boorish peasant pope and a wild, unwashed village teacher.

Life on country estates was naturally patriarchal. The nearest neighbour with similar standards of education and breeding was often twenty versts away.

At Sokoe on the hillock this was not the case. A Princess Lalin resided about five miles distant, though an exchange of visits was a laborious and tiresome business not repeated more than four or five times a year.

Count Sherevalov was not present at Sokoe when I arrived, but I was received by his daughter, Tamara. With her was her husband, whose presence no doubt had much to do with her father's absence. They had been married a little over seven years, and had two pretty children who spoke good English and bad Russian. They had had an English governess from birth.

There were a couple of young Russian officers staying in the house, besides a pair of elderly maiden cousins, who were superintending the making of the home-made jam and picking mushrooms for Count Sherevalov's "world famous table."

I arrived about four in the afternoon, after a drive of thirty versts from the railway station. The coachman had been sent to meet me and told me stories of the household all the way.

Before dinner I was already within the web of a finely spun drama. It happened in this way. After tea, Vladimir Lalin, the second husband of Tamara, took me by the arm and very kindly invited me to take a walk round the estate. There were beautiful avenues to be seen, an old church and the Lion Gates, which the Count had brought over from England. Everything was all in the English style, he told me, with an awkward eagerness to flatter my national pride.

We descended the winding carriage drive round and round the green hillock, chatting agreeably about all the little odds and ends of country life. He was a very handsome man of thirty-two, an officer in one of the crack regiments of Petrograd, broad-shouldered and fair-haired, with a pale skin and blue eyes. He spoke excellent English, lapsing into French or Russian whenever he became expletive. Both these languages seem suited for bad tempers and invective.

By the time we got to the bottom of the hill, he must have made up his mind that he could trust me with his confidences, or, perhaps, he gave way to the usual Russian weakness for disrobing his soul to the first comer. However that may be, I was soon in the thick of it, willy-nilly.

Yes, he must warn me. His wife was giving him a good deal of worry. Did I think the young officers were intriguing against him? How on earth he expected me to answer that question, after having seen the men for about half-an-hour in polite company, I could not make out. I concluded he was indulging in the tiresome Russian habit of telling his thoughts as fast as they occurred to him. And heaven knows what a Russian's inside is like when he is in the grip of an emotion. The throb is painful. Within the space of ten minutes I heard all about his matrimonial affairs, although I protested it was impossible for me to do anything for him, and very distasteful to me to offer opinions about things I neither knew nor cared for. Such a point of view, however, merely roused his indignation. I realised that I was in contact with a typical Russian "soul." It never respects your view, and will never scruple at flying off to all the artifices of cunning and mental perversion, in order to drag you into acquiescence or cover you with ignominy.

Because I declared myself incompetent to assist Vladimir Lalin in discussing his topsy-turvy domestic life, he flushed purple.

"There!" he exclaimed excitedly. "That's just what one can expect from an Englishman. Base, ignoble egotism!"

Thereon followed a long, emotional exposition of the superior merits of Russian humanity and "*Sympatichnost*" over British egotism and stone-heartedness. I drew once more the conclusion, that to satisfy this Russian demand for "sympathy" a man must turn his body and soul into a sort of Irish cabin, with the pigs and fowl of the entire

community blissfully at home in the one room. In fact, the Russian soul is of such a kind that it allows no man to call his soul his own.

My attempts to prove to the excited husband that I merely wished to respect the intimacies of his private life, failed to convince him. He threw doubts on my sincerity.

"The English are hypocrites," he said, in that dogmatic tone of finality with which I had become familiar. "Everybody knows it. Schopenhauer wrote about it."

"So did Bernard Shaw," I replied, determined to humour him. "Lots of people have to write about it. It's the homage vice pays to virtue. Writers never make a fortune out of moral tales."

It was annoying that I should have to humour a man whom I had not known more than half an hour. But in Russia one learns to look upon most Russians as wanton, neurasthenic children of nature, in spite of a stalwart exterior or a glamour of fine clothes and eclectic talk.

Swiftly turning from his condemnation of English "inhumanity and hypocrisy," he assumed the manner of an ardent pleader for charity and compassion. Russians are such natural actors, that they really fancy they believe in the emotions which stir them at the moment. They will swear by all the gods in heaven, and with tears in their voice and eyes, that they are sorry, wish to be forgiven, love you or profess any other emotion, only to declare the opposite a few minutes later. They are quite sincere, for they lack any anchor of principle or stabilising belief, that would prevent the ship of their soul from being tossed sky-high and sea-deep on the stormy ocean of their primitive desires and fears. Principle is just a matter of the tyrant's strong arm. Bolshevism began when the knout went out of force.

Vladimir Lalin pleaded with me to be his friend. His hand went to his heart, moving tones broke up his voice.

"I admit you English have character," he said. "*Akh!* one feels one can rely on you, trust you. That's because

you are so *borné*. You haven't the universality of the Russians. But that doesn't matter. A horse is all the better for being in blinkers."

I duly softened to the flattery, qualified as it was. Sitting down on a stone bench by the side of the silvery river at the foot of the avenue, I listened to his tale. It ran like this :

"When I was twenty-five, which was seven years ago, I was a cornet in the Preobrajzensky regiment. People said I was good-looking. As you see I am not bad, am I? My family was of good German descent, but I was poor compared with my fellow officers, who thought nothing of spending a small fortune on a night's orgy.

"I became entangled with Countess Tamara Tripoff, the wealthy daughter of Count Sherevalov. She hated her bad husband. The scandal of his iniquities was the favourite topic of Petrograd. His vices were sung in the cabarets. The more daring he became the more popular he got. The Sherevalov money enabled him to carry on the wildest life. Tamara refused to live with him. When she gave birth to a son, he knew he was not the father. I was. The boy was known as Count Tripoff. Tripoff stormed and raved and threatened to divorce his wife, saying that his honour had been attacked. He challenged me to a duel, but that was prevented by Tamara's parents, who threatened to cut off all supplies of money. Tripoff could not live without his wife's money. He would have to go back to a modest way of living, if supplies were cut off. That would have been too great a dishonour. It was arranged that he should accept the boy, go back to live at Tamara's flat, and that the authorities should be persuaded to send me to the Caucasus, to a regiment in garrison there. All this was done and the affair seemed to be settled.

"Unfortunately, little time passed before my regiment was ordered to Petrograd. Of course I went there. Tamara no sooner heard of my arrival than she came to see me. I

didn't care for her ; I never did. I just had the promiscuous relations one usually has. She was madly in love with me and began to pester me, pleading misery and despair. She wanted me to compromise her husband again, so that he might be provoked to divorce her. We could then get married. I was annoyed by all this and told her so. One day she came down to the barracks, and before all the officers declared that she loved me, and that I was really the father of the little boy known as Count Tripoff. I was held up to public derision. I ran away with her that very night. We took the Sebastopol express and went to live at her villa near Yalta.

" Tripoff was forced to divorce her for the sake of his 'honour.' There was the question of the boy. Legally he was Count Tripoff, but I was called before the Emperor and had to swear to my paternity. Then the boy's name was changed to Lalin.

" Things went smoothly for a while. It was convenient for me to have so much money coming into my purse, but I was not in love with Tamara. She used to annoy me with her loving fondness. She never understood that I wanted to be left alone. I was tired of life. She would come into my study, and put her arms round my neck, and try to show me how much she loved me. I couldn't stand it ! "

At this juncture, he rose suddenly and paced up and down for a few moments in silence, his hands joined behind his back, a look of angry defiance on his hard-set features.

" Well, to get rid of the nuisance I was fortunate in being blessed with a daughter," he continued, " but the happiness didn't last long. I told her I wanted to be left alone, I didn't care for her love. I had married her because my honour was involved. When the war broke out, it brought me a great relief. I got attached to the Grand Duke Nicholas's staff, and Tamara took up nursing. After a few months at that, she came down to the staff with the rest of the society women. . The staff was overrun by them

When the war first started, we had a lot of victories, but when the women came down to help us celebrate them, we soon got a taste of defeat.

"I expected an outburst of jealousy on the part of Tamara. She was ready to bring the world about my ears at the slightest sign of another woman in my life. But there was no need. Women were a broken bubble for me. She began to make things hot for me because I didn't reciprocate her love. When the Grand Duke went to the Caucasus, I went with his staff, hoping Tamara would stay behind to go on with her elegant nursing. Nothing of the sort. She followed me there, and insisted on taking a great apartment in Tiphlis. I was obliged to live there in order to escape a public row. She was determined I should not escape her affections.

"So things went on for over a year. The children were left in Petrograd with their English governess. One day I met a man who startled me with a friendly joke about my wife's new admirer. At first I failed to grasp the allusion. I asked him what admirer he meant.

'The most dashing fellow in the regiment,' he replied. 'If your wife wasn't allowed to choose her first husband, she knows how to choose her lovers!'

"I was quite stunned by this remark. It dawned on me what he was alluding to. He was grinning with satisfaction. I could have killed him on the spot. We Russians are a rotten lot. We just like to grin and laugh over any other man, whose wife is deceiving him."

He lapsed into one of those morbid tirades against his fellow-country men, which give as much pleasure to the average Russian as they do to their British imitators. The only difference seems to be that the Russian genuinely revolts against the tyranny of his countrymen's viciousness, whereas the British detractor merely indulges a childish form of snobbery.

"The man wouldn't tell me the name of the dashing

young officer, but let the venom sink in, no doubt with the hope of enjoying further developments and my suffering. I tackled Tamara with the subject, but she denied having any affection for any one but myself. I began to believe I had been made a fool of by the man, and asked myself whether it might not be a ruse on the part of Tamara to incite me to jealousy. She seemed determined to win my affection. I kept a sharp look-out, paid some servants to do the same, but I never discovered anything. I told myself that Tamara held the purse strings, and could afford to pay the same men and women double my price. In Russia we are riddled with spies and counter-spies. Everybody is in somebody's pay. The first thing a man does on taking a bribe is to go to the other party and offer his services for a higher sum. So the atmosphere of distrust and suspicion began to choke me.

"I stood it for a time. One day I was so tired of listening to the men's gossip, that I took my horse and went for a lonely ride into the hills. I wandered about for a long time and pulled up for a rest at a wayside Tartar café. I noticed two saddle horses tethered to a tree outside the wooden shanty. There was nothing unusual in that. Riding on horse is the principal means of conveyance in the hilly Caucasus.

"I got off my horse, intending to go in for a little refreshment. At the door, the Tartar proprietor informed me that it was a Tartar feast, and he could not serve Russians. I felt very thirsty and refused to be thwarted in this way. At the sight of a ten rouble note I showed him, the faithful Mohammedan made me a gorgeous salaam and invited me inside.

"What met my eyes almost took my breath away. I had my riding whip in my hand. It was a stroke of luck that I had. What I saw roused my blood to such a point of heat, that I might have used a more dangerous weapon. On the Turkish divan at the back of the café I saw Tamara

with Prince Andikoff, drinking liqueurs and flushed with excitement. I rushed in and lashed the young fool with all my might. There was a terrible scene. Tamara fainted, of course. She vowed it was nothing more than a friendly ride.

“Next day Andikoff got transferred to Kièv.

“A short while after Tamara began to complain of the climate. She said it affected her nerves. Her mother advised her to return to Petrograd, to look after her children and help in nursing wounded soldiers at her private hospital. This she did, leaving me a thousand miles behind.

“Now I’ve had to get leave in order to look after my honour again. They wrote to me from the north that Tamara was taking long absences. Where she went to no one knew. I wrote to her several times about the matter, but she merely replied that it gave her pleasure to see me getting jealous. It might be the path to love.

“I answered that it might and begged her to meet me in Moscow. She replied, telling me to come to this estate, where we could be free from the eyes and tongues of the world.”

At this point I offered the hope that all would go well with their domestic affairs, but that was beyond the hope of dreams.

“What do you think?” he asked. “Can I trust Tamara?”

Of course I could only reply I knew nothing about Tamara except what he had just told me.

He laid his hand on mine and tried to fasten it in his grip.

“One can trust you English,” he said. “Do me a favour, please! I beg you, do me a favour!”

“Well, what is it?” I asked.

“One can trust you English,” he repeated. “A cold, stone-hearted people, but trusty. Do me a favour. Keep an eye on my wife. I have got to go back to Tiphlis. She is going to remain here till November, when perhaps we

shall be able to go to Petrograd together. I have already spoken with her mother, Countess Sherevalov. She is a glorious woman. She has no nonsense, as you English say. She has threatened to cut off Tamara's allowance if there is another affair. That's why, I believe, Tamara is so sweet towards me and vows she wants me near her. There's no sign of Andikoff. But I want to find out. Do me a favour. Promise me!"

He pressed my hand again, and made a pathetic appeal with his liquid voice and blue gaze.

I gently gave him to realise that I was no spy.

"That is why I can trust you," he replied.

At the risk of a whirlwind of accusations against my character as a human being, I induced him to respect my will. There is nothing a Russian hates more than a will that refuses to bend. His last resource is invective. In this case it was a tirade against English hypocrisy and love of sustaining a character.

"*Ahh!*" he exclaimed, dismissing the matter with a downward sweep of his hand. "The devil take you! That's all hypocrisy and pride. You English give yourselves such airs, profess high morals and love to sustain the character."

I knew this as a customary charge in Russia. Life is treated as just a series of acting. A man "sustains a character" to suit his convenience. A Russian cannot realise how one can have a character based on irrefragable principles.

I convinced the suspicious husband, however, that I was neither to be bribed nor moved by pathos into being his spy.

A few days later he left for the Caucasus. Both he and Tamara swore absolute fidelity and love to each other when the carriage drew up before the door. Tears came into their eyes, and their voices trembled with emotion, as they embraced each other and reddened their cheeks with endless kisses.

As the carriage drove off, Tamara blew tempestuous kisses, and waved signs of the cross through the air in her husband's wake.

Then she went indoors and lighted ten candles before the chapel ikons.

CHAPTER VIII

A TURN OF THE PAGE

ON the evening of her husband's departure, Tamara Lalin tapped at my door. It was about eleven o'clock. The evening was chilly, so I had lighted a wood fire in the open grate, and lay on the chaise-lounge reading one of Soltykoff's novels. They give such a terribly true picture of Russian life that they have never been translated into English. I was thinking of this when the tap came.

Tamara Lalin entered the room with a bright smile. No trace of the tears she had shed for her departing husband appeared on her rosy cheeks. A merry twinkle shone in her blue eyes. She was elegantly dressed in a pink velvet opera-jacket, edged with ermine and displaying a rich lining of green and gold silk.

"I have ordered the horses and carriage," she said. "I want to go for a midnight drive through the forests and dales. It is so wonderful by moonlight. It is just like fairyland in the forest glades, and all the trees seem to dance as the horses whisk one along through the shadows of the leafy branches."

"Isn't it rather chilly and late?" I asked.

"There are plenty of warm rugs, and the later the hour the greater the fun. You will come, won't you? I'm relying on you for company."

I agreed to accompany this fair lady on her trip through moonlit fairyland. There was even a chance of meeting robbers in the dense forest.

A four-wheeled carriage drawn by two splendid horses waited at the main entrance. A host of servants attended to our comfort, when we sat in the spacious seat. Furs and rugs were spread over our knees, and silver-fox skins placed under our feet.

The night was very still, a faint, odorous breeze rustling the leaves of the avenue. In a few moments we dashed through the Lion Gates and entered the dusty village road. As we passed through the straggling row of lop-sided wooden huts, we caught a glimpse of candles burning in the tiny rooms. Some village maidens were loitering about the bridge over the sleepy river, singing peasant songs at the very top of their voices. A few yokels, in embroidered shirts and top boots, were dancing round a similar youth playing a harmonica.

The clock in the church tower struck midnight in deep resonant tones, as we dashed over the soft earth of the track through the peasants' corn fields. Then we entered the leafy darkness of the forest, where the moonlight streamed down through the branches like sails of silver gauze.

Alone in the depths of the forest, with nothing but the patting of the horses' hooves on the sandy soil, the zuzz-zuzz-zuzz of the coachman restraining their fiery zeal, Tamara Lalin opened her heart to me.

It was just what I had expected.

"What do you think of my husband?" she asked.

"I have known him too short a while to form any opinion," I replied.

She took out a scented handkerchief and wiped her tear-dimmed eyes.

"He's a brute!" she declared with sudden emphasis. "My life is one long chapter of misery and persecution. You would think he was a most charming and adorable man to look at, but he's a barbarian within. I loved him once to the point of desperation. But he despised my love. I sacrificed everything for him. But he treats me in this

atrocious way, accusing and suspecting me of untold things. Did he tell you anything? I should be so happy if I knew he really loved me."

Diplomatically I replied that he was most anxious to look after her and found his happiness in the home.

"That's just what annoys me!" she exclaimed. "I don't want his idea of home. Those children are his. What decent husband would inflict child-bearing on his wife? But that's what he has done to me. I can't bear the sight or sound of children. When I am in Petrograd I loathe to hear their voices at the flat. They take all one's enjoyment of life away. What a brute to have for a husband! And yet I love him!"

As we dashed through the dancing shadows of the swaying birch trees, she unfolded to me her view of life.

"Life has to be lived and enjoyed," she assured me. "There's no sense in leading a sick life or a life of dullness. Sickness itself shows that there is something wrong with life."

"But what do you consider life to be?" I asked.

"Pleasure," she replied. "Everything is based on pleasure. No one ever does anything but what appeals to his sense of pleasure."

"Is there no such thing as self-sacrifice and heroism?" I asked.

She broke into a merry peal of laughter that frightened the horses. They strained at the traces and swerved aside, narrowly missing the trunk of a pine-tree. The coachman pacified them with a whistle like a bird's call.

"Self-sacrifice is just another form of pleasure," she replied. "Surely you are not so naïve as to believe there is any special virtue in self-sacrifice. If a man or woman goes in for that sort of thing, they must take a pleasure in it. It's morbid, of course, but one cannot blame people's tastes. A nun leads the so-called hard life of a convent because she finds a morbid pleasure in it."

"What do you think of the men who are fighting and dying so bravely at the front?" I asked, knowing she had received a decoration from the Emperor for her "heroic services as a sister of charity."

"It's a perverse pleasure that moves them," she replied. "I nursed a man who was in a shock battalion. He told me the excitement and sense of risk and danger were the greatest pleasures he had ever known. A man never acts unless for the sake of pleasure. When he's forced to do a thing, it's pleasure that makes him avoid the punishment for disobedience."

It was revealed to my astonished ears that the chief business of life was love. Not the old-fashioned idea of love, which lasted a lifetime and was supposed to continue for all eternity, but love that was a sort of disembodied spirit floating about the dwelling-places of men and waiting to be re-incarnated in any human being of the opposite sex. This universal spirit appeared to have no personality.

"The personal man is nothing," my instructress told me. "He doesn't count at all. He may be Tom, Dick, or Harry, but as such he is only a channel. We Russians are too free, too near to the eternal to bear the chains of your English conventionality. Marriage is all wrong, because it destroys the universality of love. You cannot bind a free, universal spirit. To tie down the spirit of love and chain it with circumstance is to destroy it. The man or woman is only a circumstance. Love is beyond them. We want to get rid of *Uslovnost* (circumstantial state). If you love one person and see another you feel you love better, love is revealing itself to you more adequately in the latter. That is because Love is a spirit and requires a medium. Some mediums are better than others. We Russians are in love with Love."

I hardly think I have ever heard a truer word. From all I had seen and heard during my life in Russia I gathered that Russians love the universal. To them the particular

is something too circumscribed, trivial, *borné*, and finite to satisfy their unquenchable thirst for the infinite, the universal, the unconditioned. Not only in love but with regard to justice, truth, and all the great abstract things of life did the same rule apply. Their contempt for the concrete is as universal as their mania for the abstract. Perhaps this fluid state of their intelligence and individuality accounts for the presence of so much anarchy and nihilism and their endless talk of revolution and a universal clearing up of a bad world.

As I sat in the carriage wrapped in a mantle of furs and vaulted by the silver midnight sky, I began to wonder whether my fair and philosophic companion might not be on the look-out for the Spirit of Love. The moon was favourable for the occasion. It is rather unsettling for the most even-minded of men to realise that he may at any moment be treated as a suitable medium for a spirit in search of a lodging.

From further conversation it was manifested to me that Love went on revealing itself through a series of medium till the aspiring soul reached its earthly Nirvana, when Love would go in search of fresh and more youthful habitations. It did not take long to convince me that marriage under such conditions was a very unstable affair.

Tamara Lalin disburdened herself of her views with iconoclastic fervour.

"Apart from its utility as a status for women, marriage can only exist to confer freedom," she declared. "No woman with any sense of dignity and freedom would consent to give up her right to lead her own life. Only a slave could sell her body and soul entirely. Marriage is only meant to settle a woman's financial position and secure her social emancipation. For the modern woman it is the door to life."

We came out of the forest on to a vast stretch of grazing land. The silver rays of the moon bathed the sleeping

country in a stream of soft light. A little beyond the winding river a white house with white columns showed up against a dark background of pines and poplars. The coachman lashed the horses to their highest speed. A couple of beautiful borzoy dogs came racing down the poplar avenue to meet us. As we drove up before the terrace steps, a handsome young officer, clad in a dark-brown military jacket and raspberry-coloured riding breeches swaggered heavily forward on the creaking boards, the spurs on his bright top boots jingling jauntily.

"So glad you've come," he said, taking Tamara's hand. "To-morrow I return to the base."

The house was empty. The owners were in Petrograd. He was alone.

He led us into the house, courteously helped us to take off our furs, and showed us into a sparsely furnished dining-room. As in most country houses in Russia there was no carpet on the stained floor. A few mahogany chairs, a cupboard and a settee lined the bare walls. On the table in the centre stood a shaded lamp. The cloth was an oil-skin, torn and stained.

The young officer's manservant soon brought in a hissing samovar. Tea was made and dishes of smoked herring and sardines were placed on the table.

Talk began.

Three times the samovar was sent out to be relighted. About twenty times the talkers' tea glasses were filled. Life, politics, the war, the ballet, the scandal and gossip of the Court, the love stories of mutual acquaintances, and a hundred other topics were dealt with, the world proved to be absolutely rotten and the people all fools.

From time to time came the sound of the horses' snorting, the bark of the dogs, and later, the crow of a cock. They were nearer to me than the talk.

Gradually but surely I began to fade away into the land where there are no talkers. My head was nodding. I had

long ceased to be a member of the loose-tongued company. All I desired was that the world and its business should be allowed to take care of themselves.

But my hope of a respite was in vain. Seizing an opportunity I went outside and found the coachman snoozing on the box. I shook his arm and woke him.

It did not require much argument to convince him that the only way to get home before morning was to rush in with a great show of alarm and declare that the horses would suffer irreparable damage if they stood another moment.

Fortunately this ruse had the desired effect.

Fortified with vodka and various infusions, we started for home. The young officer in the raspberry-coloured riding breeches insisted on coming with us. The forest was infested with bandits. He left us at the Lion Gates.

All night I wondered how he got back. Twenty versts of field and forest, and no horse! And forest robbers, too!

Next day Tamara gave me a small volume of English poems. It was lying on my breakfast plate when I came down in the morning. It was called *Poems of Passion*, by E. Wilcox. Beside it was a note in Tamara's handwriting saying she left me the volume as a "souvenir of great possibilities" and that she had made up her mind to catch the early train for the south, where she was going to "take the waters" for the benefit of her tortured body and soul.

I cherished the book of poems for the sake of the inscription. A souvenir of great possibilities is far more lovable than the souvenirs of a bad conscience. I was aware, however, that Tamara had dismissed conscience as "the thunder god of the savage mind" and "a myth of the coward."

There was no doubt I had missed a good deal, but it was not unpleasant to reflect that my peace of mind had not been disturbed by the spirit of Love in search of a medium.

To make up for Tamara's departure, her younger sister

arrived from the Front. It did not take more than ten minutes to discover that the same spirit of Love was exercising her, even more sedulously than Tamara.

She arrived about tea-time and invited me to join the party for a ride on horseback across country.

The two young officers staying in the house helped to make up a party of four. As we cantered along the dusty tracks, Nathalie threw me startling scraps of her married life.

The light, corn-fragrant breeze wafted to me such surprising phrases as "My husband is a degenerate. I have given him one child and still he thinks I must sacrifice my life and pleasure to him for the sake of another creature."

We reached a sudden dip in the ground, and had to rein in our horses. Down below in the valley a band of bare-footed peasant women in red skirts and white kerchiefs were marching towards the cornfields, their sharp scythes flashing in the sun. They seemed merry and contented as they swept along singing folk-songs at the highest pitch.

"I never asked to marry him," Nathalie went on, as our horses pawed the loose earth on their way down the slope. "When a woman has given her husband one child, she is no more bound to him. She regains her freedom automatically. My husband is a perfect monster of old exploded ideas. You can't keep women in a harem nowadays. A woman must have her adventures as much as a man."

Once more I was obliged to listen to the prevailing views of emancipated Russia. The intelligentsia had managed to get its views accepted by the "cream of society." I wondered how long society would hold together with all its foundations rotting hourly away.

Nathalie was a very pretty woman. Her pale eyes had a way of glinting with sudden fires whenever she spoke of life and its complications. She never quitted her modest garb of a war sister of charity, although her heart was flaming with tropical fires.

At dusk we used to play bridge in one of the mirror rooms,

and after that diversion the samovar would be brought in and the evening talk began. I began to grow artful. The only way to get a full night's rest was by slipping up to bed without saying good-night. Oh, that Russian love of talking!

I believe it is part of the Russians' primitive nature. They always reminded me of cows lying in a field and leisurely chewing the cud. Once a Russian starts, he can never pull himself up. Give him a chair and a table and he will talk, talk, and talk till his head drops off. Once he begins to feel comfortable with anybody or in any house, it is difficult to get rid of him. *Voluptas vitæ* is his mastering spirit.

About four days after Tamara's departure, I slipped away from the talking table with the intention of going to bed. As I passed through the hall I heard the sound of a carriage driving up before the door. A woman's voice called out, "Ivan! Egor! Agrippina!"

The servants immediately rushed to the door and flung it open, switching on the light outside.

I caught sight of Tamara's white face. She was sitting in a great tarantass, smothered in a mountain of heavy furs.

I went out to greet her. It was a great surprise to find her coming back so suddenly. Had the waters done her no good?

She threw out her dainty white hand and shook mine. There was a glaring light in her eyes that made me uneasy. To my polite word of welcome, she answered with a torrent of explanations. At every gulp her arms waved like flails, and her breast heaved.

I realised something terrible had taken place. Was Russia defeated? Had the Germans broken through?

Nothing of the sort. The Front was taking care of itself. Tamara had her own battle to fight.

As her sister and the officers came out to meet her, she

jumped out of the carriage, threw off all the furs and strode up the steps with the air of an injured goddess, declaiming her griefs in a high-pitched, tremulous voice.

"I will find out who the traitor is," she exclaimed. "There is someone in this house who has betrayed me! Deceiver, wretch, villain! I'll have my revenge! Base, low, infamous scoundrel! Who is it? Who is it?"

She stamped her elegant foot on the marble step, clenching her white gloved hands and shaking her fist.

"I tell you I will find out! They shall not escape me! A worse, more shameful, repulsive piece of treachery and deception does not exist!"

Servants flitted here and there in evident fear of vengeance. Ivan and Egor the footmen hurried about with unusual alacrity in their steps, removing the luggage and arranging the furs.

"Where's Anyuta?" she asked, looking round at the terror-stricken faces of the servants.

"In her room," someone answered.

"Fetch her down at once!" Tamara ordered.

Immediately the hall was cleared of all the servants. Everyone disappeared as though swept away by a magic wand, so great was their zeal to fulfil their mistress's orders.

Having experienced Russian life so long, I slipped away to my room. Soon there came the sound of shrieks and yells. Tamara was raving against Anyuta, her dressing-maid, who was defending herself against the charge of bribery and corruption. For over an hour the altercation went on, filling the corridors of the large house with a noise that might have done justice to a madhouse.

In the morning I heard the story from Tamara's own lips. She called me into her room and poured out her trouble with a panting heart. There was such a gentleness in her manner that it seemed impossible she could have been the howling creature of the past night.

The inevitable hems of soft fluffy fur ringed her soft throat

and hands. Passion-flamed was the rich silk lining of her half-cloak. A bunch of red roses graced her bosom.

When I was comfortably settled on the divan, she poured out some Benedictine for me, taking a cherry infusion herself.

"The world is full of traitors and liars," she declared. "One can really trust no one, husbands above all! What do you think? I went away to take the waters and get a little rest after hard work in the Red Cross, and I get dragged into this dreadful business. I'm sure the wretch who betrayed me is Anyuta. I've had her over ten years, and always taken her with me, but this time I decided to leave her here. Would you believe it? She is in my husband's pay. She denies it, but I am sure it is true. Who else could betray me? And all so falsely!"

I found it somewhat difficult to answer all these questions, so I waited for a little light on the matter. Tamara was glad to have a listener.

"I suspected my brute of a husband was up to some mischief when he arranged to come here," she went on.

"But you love him!" I protested.

"I love him when he is a medium for Love," she replied. "But I hate him when he attempts these acts of treachery. I am quite sure he bribed Anyuta, and I won't leave a stone unturned till I find out. I was on my way to take the waters at Evpatoria, in the Crimea, and just made a halt at Sinelnikov, in South Russia, in order to make some purchases. By chance I met Prince Andikoff in the main street, and as he is an old friend I accepted his invitation to dine with him at his house. He is stationed at a village in the neighbourhood of Sinelnikov with his regiment. Would you believe the infamy of people? While I was enjoying a hard-earned meal after the long train journey, the Prince's manservant brought in a telegram addressed to me. How anyone could possibly guess I should be at such a place was a mystery to me. I tore open the paper and read the message. The infamy! It was from my husband in Tiphlis.

It read: 'I want to know what you are doing in the company of Andikoff. Return to Sokoe at once or I wire to your mother.'

Tamara threw out her little white hands in an attitude of mute appeal and stupefaction. Her eyes stood wide open and aghast.

"Isn't that the depth of infamy and treachery?" she asked at last. "I was so overcome that I flew into a rage. Without a moment's loss I caught the next train back and came here. I guessed that villainess Anyuta must have sent him my address. She shall leave my service on the spot! Last night she denied on her oath and the Cross she ever had a word with my husband about my affairs; but a Russian's word isn't worth a sou! She shall be thrown out of the house with all her baggage!"

"What do you intend doing in order to get the proof?" I asked, fearing her emotions might develop into a storm.

"I'm going to ask the village postmaster to let me see the telegram register," she replied. "She must have sent a telegram to my husband in Tiphlis the day I left. Besides, she must have spied in my letters to find out Andikoff's address. I want you to come down with me to the post office. It's right in the village, and the roads are so bad."

I saw it was raining outside. A trudge through muddy roads was not a pleasant prospect, so I suggested putting the visit off till the rain stopped. She agreed to do so.

"Of course, the postmaster hasn't the right to show any one the register," she added. "But that doesn't matter! Thank God we're in Russia. We have not hard and fast rules that can't be got over with a little charm."

She took out her purse and counted the ready money in it. Then she nodded her head.

"No, I don't think I shall give him any money. It seems vulgar," she said. "Perhaps a little object of value would be better. There's a gold ikon over there. Do you think he would like that? It's worth a hundred roubles."

She got the ikon out of the glass case and looked at it carefully.

"I don't think I could part with that," she said. "It was given to me on my wedding day. One sometimes feels glad to part with a husband, because the joy and pleasure soon leave him, and one wants a change. But an ikon never changes. It just keeps one's memory alive of all that was lovable. One may get rid of a husband, but it would be a crime to part with the symbol of marriage. I think I will give the man something else."

She restored the ikon to its place of honour, and picked up a silver drinking cup and saucer.

"I think that will do," she said. "Of course, I mustn't forget his wife. There's a silver paper-knife. She'll like that. It will flatter her. I shall tell her it will be useful for her to cut her yellow French novels with, although the old crow doesn't know a word of the language."

The rain held on all day. Towards dusk Tamara became impatient, and decided to walk down to the village. She would not trust either of the young Russian officers to go with her, but insisted that I should accompany her as a protection against evildoers.

In the drenching rain we set out, carrying umbrellas, and trudging through the soup-like mud.

There was a light in the upper windows of the tiny wooden post office. Tamara knocked at the door and went in. I had to remain outside in the rain and mud, because she feared the postmaster might distrust the presence of a third individual.

He must have been a man of sterner stuff than usual, for the transaction lasted over half an hour. I stood in the pouring rain, watching Tamara's shadow on the blinds. Black figures moved to and fro, and long arms were waved with alarming gesticulations. At last the sign of the silver cup, held out in placating offering, appeared on the yellow blind. The shadow of a man's arm reached out to take

it. A few moments later, the shadows lengthened out and the light disappeared, as though some one was carrying the lamp away. It appeared in the office beneath, where nothing became visible except the shadows of two heads bending over an obscure object. Suddenly there was a shriek, and the woman's shadow trembled violently.

A few moments later the front door opened, and glad voices sounded in the dark, rain-drenched air.

Tamara called out to me. There was a ring of triumph in her voice.

"Just as I thought!" she exclaimed. "I've seen the register. That infamous creature sent a wire to my husband the day I left. She goes from my house this very night!"

With a torrent of triumphant lyrics falling from Tamara's lips, we trudged through the torrential rain. I was cold and wet, and none of her joy of life cheered my drooping heart. Even my weary vigil was forgotten. I received no thanks or mention.

When we arrived home there began a tremendous rumpus. Anyuta was ordered to leave the house at once, though not before she had listened to a long exposition of her sins and failings by her irate mistress.

This led to a general inflammation of the household. Servants lingered in all the doorways, and came forward from time to time to add their heap of burning coals to those already piled high on the poor maid's head. The villainess was subjected to a moral stoning by all the household.

Shrieking at the top of their voices, mistress and maid hurled accusation and counter-accusation at each other. The outcome of it was that Anyuta hurled a sort of bombshell at her mistress. She threatened to go straight to the Countess Sherevalov in Petrograd and disclose all her daughter's private life.

This threat was most alarming to Tamara. Her mother had threatened to cut off her allowance if any trouble occurred. To Tamara nothing more embarrassing could

happen. Her lover would fade away like a mirage if her riches were taken from her. That, at least, was what she feared.

To prevent this, Tamara declared she would go herself to Petrograd by the morning train, and warn her mother not to receive Anyuta. She would tell her she had been obliged to dismiss the maid on the spot for terrible deeds connected with the soldiers stationed in the district.

After this final threat, she ordered Anyuta to pack her (Tamara's) trunk in readiness for the morning train.

To prevent the maid from leaving the house, she was locked in her room, together with the trunk and clothes.

As I went to bed I could hear her breathing fire and brimstone on her mistress and all her belongings.

In the morning I was awakened by the sound of doors being violently slammed, and a high-pitched voice crying out as though in agony and distress. Outside the world seemed blissfully calm. The yellowing leaves of the birch trees on the border of the pine forest seemed like the golden dresses of graceful dancers, about to trip the green.

As I hurried down the marble staircase I met Tamara, looking highly flushed and disconsolate.

She rushed forward to reveal the conspiracy, waving her fur-rimmed hands with bright flashes of her costly diamonds. I could almost feel the waves of electric emotion that flowed from her.

"More treachery, low, base, infamous treachery!" she cried. "When I came down this morning in order to catch the early train, I rang the bell for Anyuta. There was no answer. I went myself to see whether she had got my trunk ready. What do you think? I could scarcely believe my eyes. The floor of her room was littered with my precious linen and robes, and the window was open. While the house was asleep, that street girl of a maid got one of her soldier lovers to take her luggage through the window, put it on a peasant cart, and drive her to the station, thirty versts away, to catch the four o'clock train for Petrograd.

She left a note saying she was determined to tell my mother a dreadful pack of lies. Oh, dear! I'm in such a frightful state! What can I do to prevent her from getting there? You see what a low, evil creature she is? I must stop her from getting to Petrograd before me!"

With this purpose in view Tamara decided to consult the steward of the estate. Once again I was constrained to wait outside the house why the confabulation went on. After half an hour's talk, Tamara returned looking radiantly happy.

"I've got a sure means for putting an end to that hussy's career," she said. "We've looked at the Railway Guide and found that the train she took doesn't reach Petrograd until twelve midday. Just come with me to the post office. I won't keep you waiting this time. I'm just going to send a wire to the next stopping place of the train. I shall ask the police to arrest that creature as a thief and have her brought back here."

"Is it so easy to do such things?" I asked.

"Of course!" she replied. "The name of Sherevalov is sufficient for anything in Russia. Of course I've given the local policeman a nice present."

That evening the infuriated maid arrived under police escort. She was duly subjected to a torrent of accusations by Tamara, and ordered to pack the trunk. While she was doing this, Tamara made arrangements to meet the next train. Before leaving, she gave orders that Anyuta should be released two days afterwards. By that time there would no longer be any danger of her arriving in Petrograd and gaining access to Countess Sherevalov. The latter would be duly informed of the maid's attempted robbery and her subsequent arrest. Tamara said she would impress upon her mother that she wished to be generous and not prosecute the girl further.

Thus was justice administered six months before the Revolution.

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I saw no more of Tamara till after the Revolution. She was just about to flee from Petrograd and the howling mobs of revolutionaries to the watering places of the Caucasus. At Kislovodsk she had a beautiful villa, where she would be freer to enjoy life.

"Of course I am having my husband back to live with me," she said. "The Army is breaking up, and he will have nowhere to go to. It is when danger comes that one feels the strength of love."

I saw and heard no more of her till I met her cousin in Paris three years later. He was a young officer, and had been rescued from the Crimea by a British warship.

"What became of Tamara?" I asked him, as we sat drinking liqueurs in a café on the Boulevard Mich.

He looked at me with surprise.

"Surely you know?" he exclaimed. "It was the talk of all the aristocracy."

"Enlighten me, please!" I replied. "Was she killed by the hillsmen or massacred by the Bolos?"

He laughed out loud, swaying his body to and fro. There was a merry light in his eyes that told me life had not been too gruesome for Tamara, in spite of the horrors that had stained the soil of Russia.

"Tamara ought to have been at the court of Catherine the Great," he said. "Just listen! You know her second husband was jealous of his honour and wanted to keep her in reins? Well, she went down to Kislovodsk like so many of the aristocracy and wealthy people. Life there was much pleasanter than in the revolutionary capitals. All the old way of living and enjoying went on as though no change had taken place in the Government of Russia. Georgia and the Caucasus were free states. The cabarets and gaming-houses were chock-full every night. All the splendour of old Russia seemed to have flown there. It was a gay life.

"Tamara settled down with her husband at the villa. Not for very long, however. The Army on the German Front

broke up, and thousands of officers found their way to the gay resorts of the Caucasus. It was a terrible time. Russia was betrayed, and hardly a man cared what became of her. It was just a falling to pieces of a house of cards. Everyone wanted to get away. Some to get a breathing-space before tackling the job of restoring their country, others, most of them, in fact, just wanted to have a merry time while they could, and after them the deluge!

“Among those who found their way to Kislovodsk was Prince Andikoff. Tamara must have let him know she was staying there. She found her husband Lalin a nuisance. People had nothing to do except spend money, gamble, drink and cheat one another of their wives. Honour became the presiding deity. Duels were fought almost daily.

“Lalin was entirely dependent on Tamara for his living, and grew more and more jealous of his honour. When Tamara insisted on accompanying Andikoff to a dance or cabaret, Lalin made terrible scenes. But she was a clever woman. Perhaps she and Andikoff hatched a scheme between them. I don't know whether they did. What happened rather confirmed the suspicion of a concerted plan.

“There turned up in Kislovodsk a young dashing officer named Count Dovich. He began to pay his attentions to Tamara in such a manner that people talked of a probable ‘affair.’

“Tamara saw the possibilities. Her first act was to order Andikoff to lie low. Then she began to lead both Count Dovich and her husband by the nose. She gave Dovich every encouragement, so that Lalin was lashed into a fury of jealous feelings and offended ‘honour.’ Tamara assured him she was annoyed to the point of despair by the young officer's unwanted attentions. All she desired was to be rid of him. Night after night she played on her husband's feelings, calling him a coward for not taking the defence of his honour into his own hands. At last the climax came.

She arranged to go to the Casino where Dovich frequented the gambling-tables. He was certain to act the gallant towards her. She would pretend to be offended and Lalin, who was to come in at the right moment, should challenge the offender to a duel.

"All went like clockwork. Dovich paid his amorous attentions to Tamara in his usual way, thinking they were agreeable to her. Lalin came in at the right moment and raised the wind in the very height of the gaming. The two men stood face to face before the crowd of startled players. There were shrieks and cries, laughter and jeers.

"Lashed to fury and hatred, the two men reviled each other in good set terms. Suddenly Lalin struck his opponent with the riding-whip he was carrying.

"'Scoundrel!' he called out. 'You will wipe out this insult by way of arms!'

"Before the words were finished, Dovich whipped out his revolver and shot Lalin dead on the spot.

"In face of the breath-bereaved crowd of revellers, Count Dovich turned to Tamara and offered her his arm.

"'Come, let's leave this accursed spot!' he said. 'None but the brave deserve the fair!'

"Tamara, however, discreetly turned white and sank into a neighbour's arms.

"Next day Prince Andikoff called on Tamara to offer his condolences. Their emotions were so deep that the Prince was unable to leave the house. Three weeks later he appeared as the lawful husband of the unfortunate widow.

"As to Count Dovich, he made a desperate effort to persuade Tamara to flee with him. The pale moon was peeping from behind the snow-tipped crags of the Caucasian mountains when she opened the casement of her room in answer to his call. He had a couple of horses ready for their flight. Justice was already after him.

"'My heart is broken! I shall enter a cloister. Farewell!' was all she answered, closing the green shutters.

“ With a curse on his hot lips the disappointed lover sprang into the saddle and galloped away by the trail that led beyond the cold, moon-bathed mountains.

“When the Red Army drove the revellers from the Caucasus I met Tamara and her husband as they boarded the British warship that took us all away from our sad country. They were blissfully happy and going to her villa near Nice.”

That evening I thought of Tamara's gift to me. Inside the cover of the *Poems of Passion* was her inscription, “Souvenir of great possibilities.” I congratulated myself that the possibilities had never become realities. Who knows, I might have been made to serve the same unenviable purpose as Count Dovich. Tamara had no scruples about ways and means.

Her passage up the gangway of a foreign ship seemed to me like the symbol of the passing of the old regime. The last veneer of outward culture had peeled off. The new regime was just the old with all its crudity and nihilism openly professed and raised to a system of ethics. The Parisian dresses and starched shirts were gone, but the soul of Tamara and her lovers remained enthroned in a Red shirt and a new name over the Mongol plains of Muscovy.

CHAPTER IX

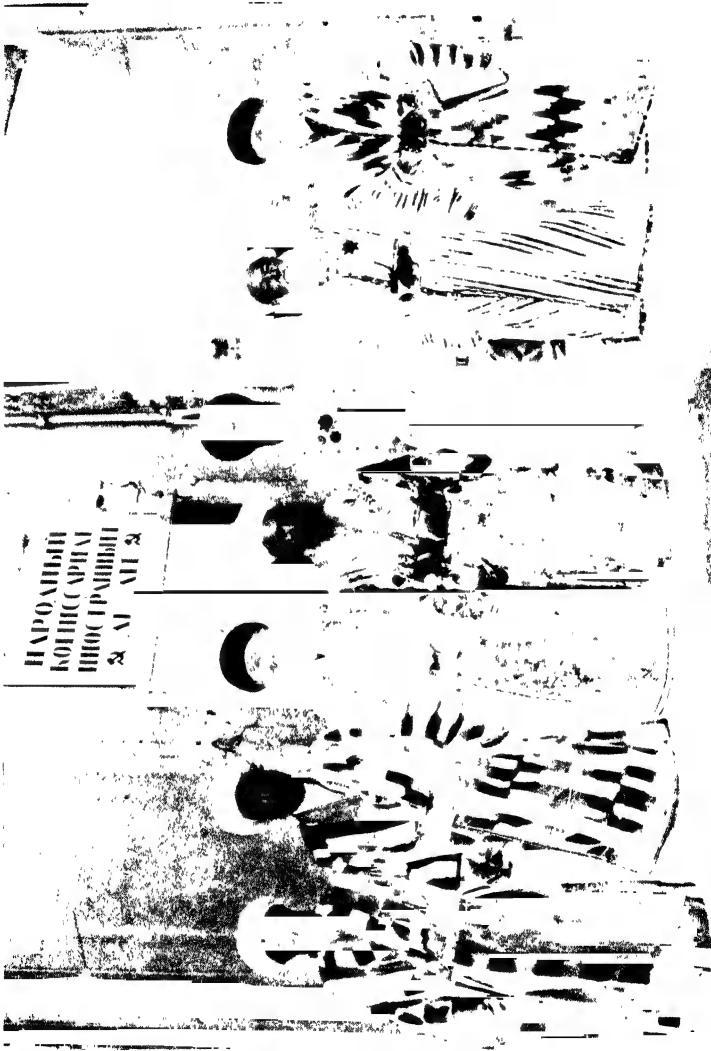
VARIOUS PEOPLE

I

ONE of the happiest memories I have of Russia is that of a tall, lantern-jawed woman with dark, glassy eyes, a pair of wide, zigzagging, thick lips and a wealth of fair hair streaked with white. She took me in hand as soon as she met me, told me to look upon her as my Russian foster-mother, and declared she would marry me off to a nice girl, I first made her acquaintance in the summer of 1915. Her son was a friend of mine and invited me to spend a few weeks at his grandmother's estate in the Government of Vladimir.

Nathalia Lvovna was her name in Russian, Madame Tyootcheff to the public. She was dressed in a light summer frock when I caught sight of her from the train that brought her son and me to the wayside station. When Serge, her officer son, sprang out on to the sand, she embraced him with such fervour and wailed so loud and often, " My son, my brave soldier son, my darling never-to-be-looked-at-enough boy ! " and reached such a point of motherly hysteria that the people who were watching the reunion of mother and son from the windows of the train shed copious tears and sobbed aloud. Another orgy of uncontrolled feeling and love of display, I thought.

Nathalia Lvovna was just a typical daughter of the Moscow bourgeoisie, although she had married a nobleman and lived most of the year in Petrograd. Her mother was



НАРОДНИЙ
КОЛЛЕКТИВ
ИНОСТРАННИИ
& А. А. А. А.

the daughter of Moscow's richest merchant and owned millions of roubles. Of fifteen children, Nathalia Lvovna was her mother's favourite. So were her children among the old lady's grandchildren.

We drove through the forest to the country house, which turned out to be a white wooden building built some ninety years ago.

Troops of children ran down the steps of the terrace to meet us. At the windows of the servants' quarters groups of smiling faces peered at us. Shuffling across the balcony before the front door Babushka, the grandmother and hostess, came forward to receive us.

There were cries of joy and tears of happiness. Everyone was in a state of ecstatic excitement because the soldier son had returned for a few weeks. It was true he had not been in any danger in his staff job at the front, but that did not matter. He was away from home and imagination surrounded him with untold horrors.

Babushka kissed him, fondled his fair hair and shed tears of joy and gratitude over him. The children danced about him, pulled his clothes as if to make sure he was really in the flesh and not a phantom, while two sensitive schoolgirl cousins in grey gingham uniforms and neat plaits of hair embraced each other with wails of endearment and gazed at their military cousin with romantic eyes.

When the orgy of "soul" was finished it was a relief to enter the dining-room and sit down at the table, on which the samovar was hissing and great piles of honey, kholva, Tartar sweetmeats, chocolates, cream, curdled milk, strawberries, raspberries, peaches, jellies, ices, cakes, apples, and a host of other delicious eatables were spread out in tempting array.

Babuska took her chair at the head of the long table, while the grown-ups and children occupied places along the side in order of age, ending up with the sewing-maids, housekeepers, and upper servants at the bottom.

Everybody made the sign of the cross, turning towards the ikon suspended in the corner of the room opposite the door. After that pious act, the scene became one of utmost confusion, boys, girls, and grown-ups grabbing the eatables, calling for them at the top of their voices over the prevailing din, jumping up and fetching them from afar when they were not passed on quick enough, abusing one another for being "pigs," taking the best and biggest, gobbling the food with an avidity not surpassed by hungry wolves. Yet this scene went on every day. Never in all my travels had I ever witnessed such grossness of enjoyment. It was typical of Moscow. I read somewhere that even Mr. Stephen Graham found the Moscow bourgeois rather trying in this respect.

After tea we were invited to play tennis and then go down to bathe in the river. Tennis was a very exciting affair and none too good for one's temper. The young Moscow ladies shrieked with joy, clapped their hands, crowed their certainty of victory whenever the play went in their favour. They stamped their feet in rage, made rude remarks to their opponents, accused them of cheating, threatened to throw up the game and tried to rout the enemy with invective whenever the play went against them.

Quarrels and abuse became so frequent at tennis that I refused to play except with people I could rely on to behave in a civilised manner.

Bathing in the river at the end of the garden was a communal affair. All the little moujiks from the neighbouring villages came to take part in it, besides the village priest and the deacon. Village maidens bathed a few yards away. There was no question of modesty anywhere. The Russians have none in general. Even in the heart of Moscow men and women bathe without any costume in the River Moscow by the side of the Kamenny Bridge and along the banks, stretching themselves out to dry in the sun. It was also

frequent to see father, mother, sons and daughters, with their week's washing in bundles, entering the "family baths," where the entire family perspired and washed themselves and their clothing in unmitigated community.

On the night of my arrival at the country house, I witnessed some of the most terrible things a man can come across in a European country. I will not enter into details, but confine myself to the statement that the attitude of the "educated classes" towards peasant girls is the crudest, basest, most brutish one can imagine. Only in the light of what is experienced in the Russian "educated classes" can one understand the deep revulsion that lay at the bottom of Tolstoy's heart and drives so many Russians to suicide, nihilism, revolution, anarchism and terrorism, or to heroic acts of self-immolation and wild plans for a universal reformation of mankind.

It seems incredible, but all the brutish acts which in Europe are associated with the lowest criminal class are accomplished and boasted of by "educated" Russians as deeds of manly valour. No doubt the lateness of the abolition of serfdom, the absence of personal liberty and respect, the prevailing autocratic ideas and methods in the use of life and the means of enjoyment, have been largely responsible for this barbarous state of affairs. Compared with the ordinary "emancipated" Russian, the Turk is a gentleman.

II

One morning I came into the breakfast room and heard terrible language coming from a corridor. A few minutes later Madame Tyootcheff rushed in, flushed and excited.

"What would an English lady do?" she asked. "Tell me! What would an English lady do?"

In panting tones she related how her maid had contradicted her about a pair of shoes. For more than ten years

the maid had been in the habit of putting a pair of shoes in readiness for her mistress every morning. That morning she had put an odd pair by mistake. She had denied it, declaring she had never made a mistake during her ten years' service. She had been so obstinate in denying the oddness of the pair, that Madame Tyootcheff had lifted her voice over to its highest pitch and thrown the offending shoes at her.

"Would not an English lady have done the same thing?" she asked.

Such scenes were common in Moscow bourgeois families and not infrequently in those of the Petrograd aristocracy. To bully the servants was considered a mark of superiority. Forgiveness and kisses followed.

Madame Tyootcheff, however, had a very bright, golden side when she was not very dark. I stayed at her house in Petrograd during the February Revolution, when she lay on the floor of her bedroom shrieking out that she wanted her sons to be killed by the Germans, because Russians were not fit for Revolution and would only kill one another.

A good turn which she had done to an orphan boy some years before the War proved to be very useful to her after the Bolshevist Revolution. A poor boy had once come to her door offering to cut up logs for her. Finding his name suggested a connection with a noble family, she made enquiries and discovered he belonged to the nobles' caste and had been cheated of his heritage by a roguish uncle, who had turned him adrift.

Nathalia Lvovna took pity on him, dressed him in fine clothing and took him into her house to be educated with her sons.

He never lost touch with the young Petrograd hooligans he had lived among, and when the Bolsheviks seized power he was able to get an appointment as commissar. He was then only nineteen. His companions of the gutter were not

slow in offering their services to the new Government and received high offices. Borya, the orphan, was appointed Commissar for Art, and received the right to confiscate any work of art or antiquarian value in any house of one region of the Capital. Luckily he had not forgotten Madame Tyootcheff's kindness to him and gave his Commissarial authority to protect both her house and the priceless treasures it contained.

III

In Petrograd I met a Duchess of Lichtenberg whose one great aim in life was to save her eight children from becoming easternised. The Mongolian spirit had made such sweeping inroads among the semi-foreign aristocracy that western ideas and social forms were being rapidly submerged. She had a very artistic temperament herself and gave public concerts on the piano, but to counteract the debilitating effect of too much art on the character, she adopted very startling methods in every-day life. She asserted at all seasons and on all occasions that energy made life worth while and energy could only be acquired by making constant efforts to acquire it. Although her children were related to the Imperial family and lived in a beautiful mansion overlooking the Neva, besides possessing a castle in Bavaria, she obliged them to lead a life of Spartan austerity for fear they should lose their moral stamina in the Russian atmosphere of "nichevo" and nihilism. Every morning they were roused from sleep at five o'clock and made to clean their boots. This to the ordinary Russian aristocrat was the depth of degradation, but to the Duchess of Lichtenberg it stood for much in building up character. In fact, I rather think she overdid the boot business.

She would be found walking about the palace with an old dirty boot on her beautiful artistic hand, polishing it with a startling show of energy. Often she would receive her

guests with a boot on her left hand, giving the impression that she had been obliged to tear herself away from the pure, wholesome and salutary work of cleaning boots.

Her husband was a perfect dear, tall, handsome and debonair. He was kind and indulgent towards her as though she were the sweetest gazelle. Whenever they had distinguished guests, among whom were often their cousins, the daughters of the Tsar, the Duchess would invariably act as her husband's spokesman. He would start a conversation with a guest or two and after a little while she would join in. He would begin a sentence expressing his thought, but hardly ever finish it. The Duchess would seize the idea, and in a loud, commanding voice, give it her own form of expression, beginning: "My husband means to say——"

Her gentle husband would suffer the word to be taken from his mouth and smile calmly and peacefully. I fancy there was a hidden tragedy behind that Spartan front and its seraphic fellow.

In any case, the Duchess was quite thorough in her method. A niece of hers, a Countess Mussin-Pushkin, who once spent a holiday at her aunt's castle in Bavaria, told me that she broke her wash-jug on the day of her arrival. The Duchess refused to allow it to be replaced, telling her young and beautiful guest she must get up with the lark and wash under the pump in the old courtyard.

At the house of Count Mussin-Pushkin I met a young Prince Viazimsky and his mother. One day the poor woman came to the Count and asked him to give her shelter for a while. She had long been uneasy about her son. He had joined a club of young people who were never satisfied with doing the ordinary things of life.

One day she had some friends to tea at her house. Being very fond of her son and proud of his talent in oil-painting she naturally spoke a good deal about him and his works while pouring out tea for her guests. She pointed to the

beautiful paintings of birch forests and laughing meadows, snow-capped golden domes and silent wintry paths.

The chorus of admiration grew, and the guests begged to see more samples of the young man's work.

"I think you would enjoy it if he came and explained them to you himself," the proud mother said, ringing the bell. She asked the footman to call her son to the drawing-room.

The servant returned a few moments later to say that the young Prince was not at home.

"Oh, dear!" the Princess sighed. "I suppose he's gone to one of his meetings. The young people do nothing but form themselves into societies for all sorts of unusual things. I don't know what the world is coming to."

After a little tirade against modern youth, the fond mother bethought herself of some drawings that were stowed away in the great Dutch cupboard at the end of the room. It looked very massive and imposing in the light of the shaded electric candles on the walls. It was winter and the curtains were drawn.

"I'll show you some of his early work," she said, hurrying towards the cupboard. "They used to be stored in this old cupboard. *Voyons!*"

She pulled the knob of the door with her little white hand. It yielded easily as though it had not been properly fastened. On its creaking hinges it swung back heavily, solemnly.

The Princess gave a piercing shriek and staggered backwards, white as a ghost and aglare with horror.

Slowly from out the dark interior of the cupboard a body swung forward, dangling on a rope tied to a hook. Large, gaping eyes in a distorted face glistened coldly in the faint light of the shaded lamps.

Princess Viazimsky lifted her hand to her brow and cried out as though her heart had been stabbed.

"My son!" she gasped. "He has hanged himself!" Stumbling forward she sank down at the feet of the corpse, her head resting on a heap of drawings in a childish hand.

The footman picked up a scrap of paper that had fallen out. On it was written : " Suicide Club. Drawer to commit suicide within twenty-four hours."

I had a young friend named Prince Urusoff. When war was declared he wished to enter the Army, and was received into the Corps des Pages. To assist him in his military training his parents engaged an officer as a companion-instructor. The young prince made excellent progress in horse-riding and the *savoir faire* of a young officer of high birth. He found his companion a very amiable man, full of interest in his work, his food and his dress. Like most Russians of his class, the instructor had an absorbing fondness for tragic literature. He would carry a small edition of Edgar Poe's *Tales of Mystery* in his pocket and discourse eloquently on their beauty and charm. He had the usual Russian fondness for the ballet, caviare, Bacchanalian night life and morbid souls. He was never long without an outburst against what he called " the tyranny of convention," idolising the " universal and eternal." With his fellow-officers and student friends he would talk for hours and hours over a succession of tea glasses about the futility of life and the dismal prospect of eternity.

" Why do we do all these mad things ? " he would ask, waving his hands and lifting his eyebrows. " We go on eating and drinking, amusing ourselves and sleeping. Even this war, is there anything more stupid ? Why do we love and hate ? Is it not all madness ? We shall all be as grass one day. This very earth will dissolve into the mist of space one day. It is already beginning to shrivel up. Science has proved it. Why do we go on living, I ask ? Even this sitting here and talking, what is it but madness ? Where does it lead us to ? What help will it bring us against the merciless grip of time and death ? We are circumscribed. We are children of circumstance ! "

After such outbursts, to which his companions added the blue fire of their own scientific pessimism, he would lapse

into a strange, ominous gloom. Then with a sudden burst of energy, that seemed like the revolt of despair, he would order vodka, champagne, zakuzki, caviare and other good things in profusion, and set to consuming them with wolfish pleasure, heightening his appetite and excitement with copious draughts of alcohol.

In this top-speed dash against the power of oncoming extinction, he and his companions acquired a wild, barbarous capacity for physical enjoyment, that reminded one of the revels of the Golden Horde. They would shout and rave, curse and blaspheme, and finally repair to haunts of the coarsest depths, ending in the brutish vilification of their victims.

Then they would return to normal life for a while, thinking no wrong of themselves, because they were conscious of having gone the usual round of Russian life.

One day, after such a chapter of dismal "scientific" talk on the meaning of life, and a subsequent race against time and death, the young officer returned home with his pupil and went to bed.

They shared the same room, a large, plainly-furnished apartment on the top floor, with high windows through which the crinkled, speckled domes of the church of the Resurrection were seen in the distance, as through a frame.

It was a pale, moonlit night, the silver face of the moon peeping from behind the shadowy domes of the church. Its soft, caressing light was enough for them. They did not trouble to switch on the electric light or to draw the curtains.

Hazy with the waking dreams of mingled wines, Prince Urusoff sank down into the cosy folds of his bed. For a long time he could not coax sleep to come to him, although he had to rise early for military duty. From the bed of his companion came gentle mutterings. They were so different from the savage ravings of a few hours before. He listened involuntarily, as to the soft murmur of a praying saint in ecstasy. The man's voice was full of a sweet,

well-tuned resonance. He was reciting some poems of Andrei Biely. There was a loveliness of feeling and gentleness of tone in his voice that captivated his listener. Time after time he repeated the sonorous sentences, as though drawing deeper and deeper at their hidden truth and joy.

The moon still rained in her silent beams through the high, glinting windows. The man's voice lost its note of joyful ecstasy and became sad and gloomy. It seemed as though the sudden, strange emotion that had inspired him was fading from his vision. He murmured the words sadly, hopelessly :

"Enough ! Wait not, nor hope—
Scatter, my poor, sad people !
The torturing years fall one by one
Into devouring space.

"Ages of thralldom, poverty . . .
O let me pass, my motherland,
Over your coarse lot sighing,
Over your barren lot . . .

"To where there gaze into my soul
From out the night behind the hills,
The lowering, cruel and yellow eyes
Of thy wild-maddening liquor-shops.

"To where the nimble track has passed
Of endless deaths and dread disease ;
O vanish into space, O fade,
My Russia, my poor Russia ! . . .

"And I shall hide beneath the stifling clouds,
O grave, my dearest mother !
Thou only like a broken wreath
Wilt never cease to sigh o'er me."

The murmuring voice died down till at last it was heard no more. In the stillness that followed, Prince Urusoff soon fell asleep.

After a troubled sleep, he woke up with a feeling of nausea. Wondering what the hour was, he looked towards the window. The light was very dim, for the resplendent moon had gone, and the crinkled domes of the church were like grotesque black forms against the dark, grey sky. His

eyes grew accustomed to the dimness and his sleepy head passed from the nebulous stages of semi-consciousness.

It was day break, he knew. The air was chilly and a lowering stillness brooded over everything. As he looked again towards the window, he gave a start. A white face, dimly seen, was looking towards him from the upper pane. He called to his companion. No answer came from him. He must be fast asleep after his night-life.

The young man grew anxious. Might not the strange nocturnal visitor be bent on sinister deeds? He must have reached the window by way of the coppice, which ran round the top of the building. Burglary, murder, a shot through the window? All these things were possible, even frequent. The thoughts flew through his brain like fiery darts. Throwing off the bedclothes, he sprang out and rushed towards the window, hoping to scare the man away and raise the alarm.

As he stretched out his hand, it knocked up against something. He staggered back in amazement. Before him the body of his companion dangled on a leather belt from the window bolt.

"I felt so merry afterwards," the young Prince told me, "that I took a month's leave to have a good time, and had to get six months more to get over that. The only way to deal with life is to drain it to the dregs. Sipping is all right for old maids, but a man wants strong, blood-boiling stuff."

IV

The Mussin-Pushkins are mentioned by Byron in his poem "Mazeppa." That, however, is not their only claim to distinction. They have, of course, increased and multiplied since those days, and are now a veritable tribe of Counts and Countesses.

One family who lived in Petrograd was possessed of vast wealth. To their beautiful house near the Seguevskia

flocked the cream of society. They were not like other folk, and would have repudiated all desire to be. In a world aching to be "original," they aimed at being super-original. They took up war work with great zest for about three months—such was to be the duration of the war, according to the military and political high-priests—and as the flaming illusion of an early peace faded away into the long, grey, monotonous drabness of weary waiting and shattered hopes, they became absorbed in the whirling life of luxury and enjoyment that came into vogue with the profiteers. The Tsar and Tsarina were living an exemplary life of self-denial, while their "faithful" subjects abandoned themselves to the madness of what money buys.

The two young Countesses loved to see their parents' house surging with laughing guests. They would drive about the streets of Petrograd in their sumptuous car, frightening the people with its terrific speed.

"I love to live," one of them exclaimed to me as we flew down the Nevsky Prospect, to the amazement of a long queue of women waiting outside the bakers' shops. She was a pretty girl of twenty-two, with "pansy" eyes that darted purple fires.

"Life is so exciting, so thrilling!" she declared, clapping her hands and throbbing with such a quiver of emotion, that I feared she would fall out of the car in her enthusiasm for life. I had heard of the ferment of souls, but it seemed to me that in Russia the ferment goes off with a loud bang, and leaves a life of long, dull moaning and despair to follow.

Countess Catherine-Mussin Pushkin was in full ferment. She insisted on telling all about herself, her longings, fears and hopes to any man she judged to be "sympathetic." She did not fear the darkest depths of self-analysis. She related everything with joyful frankness.

"One must be sincere in life," she said by way of self-adulation.

The French novels she devoured day by day were lent

by her to her acquaintances. Passages that appealed to her were underlined in red ink. The shock of revelation was more than I cared for when the books came my way. I had old-fashioned ideas that Countesses should foster high ideals, and I had a disgust for such public confessions.

Whenever the young Countess received her friends and acquaintances, she was always found reclining in a haze of incense, amid fragrant flowers, in her Turkish room. Little red and blue lamps hung from the ceiling, and rich Turkish furniture and carpets adorned the apartment.

When it became the fashion to mimic the style of ancient Greece, she received her guests reclining on a long couch. Similar couches were provided for them, and they were expected to discard their ordinary clothing and don the Greek costumes, provided in the cloak room. Greek dancing was performed, and the cuisine was supposed to be a reproduction of that described in the classics.

When the Revolution came in February, the Mussin-Pushkins shook the dust of Petrograd off their feet, and fled from the "loathsome sight of the rabble" to the high life of the watering places of the Caucasus. Before they left, however, they were obliged to hang out a red flag from the house in honour of the Revolution. The indignant Countess Mother took an old red petticoat, tore out a long strip, big enough for a flag, went into the backyard and trampled it in the snow, jumping on it in fanatical glee. When her heart was satisfied, she ordered it to be hung out on the flagstaff.

They returned when Lenin came to Russia. It was to look after their belongings and arrange for the transference of money abroad. Hosts of landowners and nobles were doing the same thing. Everywhere one heard their lament :

"The merchants have arrived! The merchants have got the power! Who can live under a government of merchants!"

Only those who lived among the Russian nobles during the months following the February Revolution can

adequately realise their mortal hatred for the "arrived" merchant government. The loathing which they displayed towards the Tsarina, because of her pan-Russian, pro-peasant policy, was now directed against the merchant classes, who had obtained the reins of government under Kerensky.

"The tradespeople have arrived!" how often one heard that cry!

It seemed almost impossible for the overthrown nobles to forgive or forget. Their arrogance was so great that they blinded themselves to the realities of the position. When the voting for the election of the General Assembly was to take place, the Bolshevik Party was given number five. I was horrified, wherever I met the former privileged class, to hear them encourage their servants and workpeople to vote for Lenin's number five. In those days, Lenin appeared to them like a possible saviour. They thought he would be a useful instrument to bring the "merchant government" to the dust, and lead to the restoration of the old regime and their privileges.

Everywhere one heard them consoling themselves. "*Chiem khujhe, thiem luchshe,*" was their slogan. (The worse it becomes, the better.) They did everything possible to prevent the "merchant government" from ruling the country and restoring order.

"Anarchy is the mother of order," they said. "If Lenin gets the power he will save the country. The people will be tired of his madness after a few months, and they will welcome us back with open arms."

When Lenin seized power, hardly a "noble" resisted him. The richest of them had flocked to the south. Those who resisted him were mostly youthful cadets, civil guards of the middle classes, and armed women. No Russian noble degraded himself by resisting the downfall of a merchant-class government.

The people soon realised what a merciless power had

seized them in its grip, but the strength to overthrow was never given them. If the Russians could put up with Tsarist tyranny for two hundred years, they will put up with Bolshevist terrorism, perhaps, quite as long. And their chance to organise against it adequately will never come, because the chief Russian enemies of Bolshevism have neither forgotten nor learnt anything from their overthrow. They will never cease talking of themselves and their claims, as if they were descended direct from the Creator.

CHAPTER X

ON EASTER EVE

EVERYBODY was wildly excited because the long-desired, long-dreamt-of Revolution had taken place. There was a spontaneous outburst of true Christian feeling in those first few days of freedom. A clear light shone in the eyes of passers-by in the streets, a light of joy and charity.

"Now we can breathe at last," men said to one another. "Russia is starting on a new, glorious path. We are all brothers. We must help one another."

In the trams, in shops, in the dismal queues at the provision shops, in all the manifestations of communal life, the joyful citizens showed a wonderful, new-born deference to one another. The old system of privilege and corruption, of oppression of the poor and riot of the rich, was done with for ever. There was no need to think of bribes or bombs any longer. Everything would be distributed and enjoyed fairly and squarely by the Sovereign People themselves. In those first hectic days of gladness, this hope was a stirring, brightening emotion, bursting in the weary, down-trodden, worm-eaten soul of Russia like a sudden flame. With the first free Easter and Spring at hand, there was a thrill of hope and glory in the air. Lenin had not yet arrived, the little cloud had not yet risen on the hem of the clear, hosanna-filled heavens.

Even so clear and joyful was the vision of my friend Serge, when he burst into my room and waved his arms frantically. During the two years he had spent in the study of the law at the University, he had, of course, given

most of his time to politics and revolution, like every respectable Russian intelligent. With the overthrow of Tsardom, his hopes were well on their way to realisation. A month of feverish activity in organising the liberated people had followed. Easter being at hand, Serge wanted to go down to the country and see how the peasants of his father's estate had taken the change.

"Comrade!" he called out—the word had not yet begun to stink in the nostrils of all honest men—"I'm off to my native village. Fifty miles outside Moscow. Care to come with me? The Revolution in the village, you know. Somewhat different from town. The folk are benighted, illiterate, beasts if they are led astray. All the same, my hopes are rainbow bright!"

I agreed to accompany him. I knew the village and surrounding country well, having stayed there on several occasions.

We packed up a few necessaries and caught the evening train to Moscow. The train was crowded, full of happy smiling folk, going to their homes for the greatest Russian feast. The Revolution and its prospects kept people talking like gramophones with endless springs. I began to foresee a danger. The Revolution and its freedom would be drowned in talk. Already Kerensky was giving the lead.

Britain and her parliamentary ideals were in favour.

"Take England!" a greybeard was declaiming in the crowded corridor. "A marvel of organisation and freedom! Where are we with our medieval ways and doings?"

A little red-faced man squeezed himself into the train at a station. Everyone did his best to make room for him. The spirit of help-one-another was still abroad.

The little red-faced man thanked everyone profusely, smiling and bowing as best he could in a tight fit.

"Thank you most humbly, Sare!" he repeated. He was amorous of this English word "Sare." It brightened every moment of his weary journey. It was the word

of the moment, English, and, of course, the summit of civilisation.

"Sare conductor!" he called out as that official wedged his way through the struggling mass of humanity.

"I most humbly beg your pardon, Sare passenger!" he said to me after stepping painfully on my toes.

"Why do you say 'Sir' to people when you are in Russia?" I asked him.

He turned an appreciative eye on me and paused to think.

"How did you know I was an Englishman?" I asked, noticing his suspicious gaze.

"Oh, Sare Englishman!" he replied, brightening up suddenly. "Give me your hand! Handshake? Eh?"

He gripped my hand and wrung it as hard as he could.

"Lord Beatty shakes like that," he assured me. "He has a square chin. I saw his picture in the *Universal Panorama*."

I looked at his lower face and found he had about as much chin as a pigeon.

"I want to be an Englishman," he confided to me. "*Slavny Narod!* (Wonderful folk). Besides," he added after a meditative pause, "I don't like this way of calling one another 'comrade.' A man who calls you comrade will soon walk off with your shirt. I know them. 'Underground work,' they call it. Underground work for fear of the police. That's all the tradition behind the word 'comrade.' Spy and counter-spy, provocateur, selling one another for a few copecks more. But 'Sare!' There's a word that means something! There's a thousand years of freedom and respect behind that word."

He waved his hand excitedly as though shunning an evil visitation.

"Take that 'comrade' away!" he called out. "Sare! sare! sare! sare every time for me!"

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When the crowd thinned out, Serge and I were able to

find a seat. Taking a gold cigarette-holder and case out of his pocket, he handed it to me to inspect. I noticed it bore some intricate initials.

"I'm taking this down as an Easter present for Father Ivan," he said. "I owe a lot to him. He is an honest Gapon."

When Serge and the village priest met, they kissed each other in the Russian manner.

"Now this will be a true Easter!" the priest exclaimed in a mild, gentle voice. "Freedom at last. I shall be a real shepherd and not a wolf in disguise."

Serge offered him the gold cigarette-holder and case as a memento.

Father Ivan shook his grey locks at the sight of the gold and the elaborate engraving.

"Thank you with all my soul, little son!" he said. "The people don't mind a gold cross. They would give their last copeck to buy one for me, but this! My God, my God! Luxury, corruption!"

He laughed gently and put the shining present on to his writing-table.

"Don't worry, Father Ivan!" Serge replied. "There will soon be no distinction between rich and poor, luxury and poverty. We shall none of us possess things. We shall merely have the use of them. You will have the use of the gold cigarette-holder, do you see? I've come down to teach the peasants the first principles of Socialism. They will understand in time."

Father Ivan shook his grey locks. He had his doubts.

"The folk are benighted," he said. "*Narod tiomny*. They do not understand so easily and their passions carry them away."

At that moment a number of peasants stumped into the low, wooden room. They had come on business connected with the feast.

Serge, young and ardent, seized the opportunity to

congratulate them on the Revolution. His enthusiasm for his great ideal carried him away. He could not resist the temptation to impart a little knowledge to these benighted folk. Taking up the gold cigarette-holder, he showed it to them and explained the principles of Socialism, concerning the abolition of private property, and how an object would be delegated for use only.

The peasants stood, hat in hand, listening respectfully to the young Socialist's eloquent outpourings.

Midday struck in the green-roofed white tower of the village church. I left Serge haranguing his "benighted," audience and went outside to gulp down a breath of fresh air.

In the evening the church porch was lined with peasant men and women, before whom lay large Easter cakes wrapped in embroidered linen. On each cake flickered a lighted taper. The Vesper bell was tolling.

There was a stir inside the church. Voices, excited and subdued, came nearer and nearer the door.

"Father Ivan's coming to bless the cakes!" the murmur went round, and all eyes turned towards the dim interior of the church, where the yellow flames of the myriad candles glittered like stars in the bluish incense haze before the golden ikons.

The toothless sexton and the choir appeared. He was shuddering and as pale as a ghost. His eyes were pools of horror.

"Father Ivan!" he gasped. "He lies at home in a pool of blood. They have murdered him! O—o—oh!"

In a moment the crowd dispersed, rushing breathless to the priest's wooden house.

He had picked himself up from the floor where lay a pool of crimson blood, and sunk on to the bed.

He could hardly speak. He pointed to the window, and murmured the words: "Gold cigarette-holder! The devil's luxury! They have punished."

Death cut short his groans.

We looked at the window ; the murderer had fired a shot as the priest sat or stood by his writing-table. The gold cigarette-holder and all the money of the priest were gone.

In the kitchen lay the body of the old housekeeper. She appeared to have been knocked down in attempting to leave the house to give the alarm.

That night the bells of the church were silent. The midnight Easter Mass did not take place.

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A year later, Serge invited me to the village again. Lenin was in the seat of power and Russia was in a bad way. Poor Serge's hopes had come rattling to the ground like the charred sticks of dazzling rockets. The reign of freedom and revolution had ended in a bath of blood. Comrades were putting comrades to death. Serge had lost faith.

" I thought the revolution was so wonderful and brilliant," he said, as we walked towards the village from the railway station. " It was indeed. But only because the night before was so dark and so long."

Breaking off from the village road, he led me into the forest. " I want to get away from people," he said despondently. " I begin to loathe humanity."

We roamed about the silent forest, visiting the haunts which Serge had loved in his boyhood.

Suddenly a man appeared ; he carried a rifle and wore a red armet. Serge recognised him as Mitrofan, the forester.

" I'm commissar of these woods," he declared. " I take you in charge as bourgeois counter-revolutionaries. You are spying against the Soviet of the peasants."

He shouted a loud " Ah-hoo ! " that went echoing through the deep forest. In reply two armed men hurried up and helped him to escort us to his hut.

There in true revolutionary fashion we were searched and relieved of our valuables. Even our cigarettes were

confiscated. When all was finished, Mitrofan handed a few of the cigarettes to his companions.

"We'll share these for our trouble!" he said, laughing coarsely.

They started to smoke, while Mitrofan, a look of pleasure spreading over his rough features, took a cigarette-holder from his breast pocket and inserted a cigarette. He stuck the shining gold stem between his teeth and smoked with an air of having done good work.

I glanced at Serge. His eyes were sparkling, lit up with a new flash of hope and interest.

Suddenly, like the hum of a monster bee, a deep-toned bell began to boom in the distance.

The three peasant commissars listened, besieged by some new vision.

"They're ringing for Vespers!" Mitrofan exclaimed. "Let's be off! Maybe we can help!"

His coarse laughter seemed to fill the little room with shadows.

"We can take these devils down to the Revolutionary Tribunal," he said, indicating us.

Accordingly we were led down to the village.

People were making their way to church. The three commissars hurried to the church door. There, as usual, were the traditional Easter cakes and tapers. A larger crowd than usual were waiting for the priest. Word had gone round that the Soviet Government had decided to abolish the feast and all religion. It might be the last time they would hear the joyful words "*Christos Voscrese!*" (Christ is risen!) and give one another the triple Easter kiss.

The crowd fell back as the three men entered the porch, rattling the butts of their rifles on the stone-flags.

Serge, however, sprang forward, an eager light in his eyes. Loud and clear his voice rang out:

"Little brothers! There is the murderer of Father

Ivan!" he said, pointing his finger at the commissar. "Search him! He has the gold cigarette-holder in his pocket!"

The commissar staggered back against the wall, white and trembling. The rifle fell from his hand and clattered to the floor. A dozen rough hands seized him and tore open his coat. The missing holder was soon held up before the eyes of the astonished crowd.

That night the peasants held a meeting, searched the forester's hut and found other articles of the murdered priest. The terrified commissar confessed all, blaming his companions for the murder.

"Mercy! mercy! for the sake of the risen Saviour!" he wailed. "It is Easter. Let us kiss one another and forgive!"

That night the village bells rang for the midnight Mass. The murderers were present and received the Easter kiss from the peasants.

Some time later the Central Soviet authorities, moved to "weed out" the appalling number of criminals in their service, had the three men shot. When Serge heard of it he was gloomy; no feeling of satisfied justice stirred his disillusioned heart.

"There always will be gold and glitter for the few and dull drab stuff for the many," he said. "Who's to determine who shall have the use of the fine things? The poor devils just did what the Bolsheviks have done, decided the matter by killing off the actual owners. Folk are benighted beasts. The Revolution has only stirred up the mud in the water. Konetz! I'm going to England with you."

CHAPTER XI

THE NOVEMBER REVOLUTION

THE first greeting the Bolshevists gave me of their step towards power took the form of a bomb, which one of their number mischievously misplaced from an attic in the neighbourhood of the house at which I was staying in Moscow. I did not expect that their raucous clamours and frequent parades of red rag would concentrate into so striking a form of expressing conviction. Luckily I was unconvinced and unmoved, beyond a slight jar of the nerves, and as the Bolshevik bomb had blown a pretty good hole in the front of the house and had shattered every window, I decided a dignified retreat into the basement was the most advisable means of avoiding conversion to Bolshevism or bits.

I found great consternation among the inhabitants of the basement, in which were situated the servants' quarters and the kitchen. A war of words and wishes had been in progress among the domestics, who were divided into Bolshevists and opponents. For reasons unknown to me, the cook, a strong man of some forty years, with a strong inclination for vodka, women and petty purloining, headed the group of Bolshevists, which included the voluble laundress, whose work at the wash-tub was always accompanied with high-pitched oratory on her plans and projects for the immaculate millennium of Bolshevism. Her husband, the coachman, spent most of his spare time in backing her up, while their combined efforts were strengthened with the bloodthirsty beliefs and broom of

the loitering yard-man. Against them were arrayed the housekeeper and the butler, an elderly man of genteel look and manners whose youth had been spent in the regiment of the Guards. He was a man of discipline and order, smart both in appearance and in action. He had long ago learnt the personal value of honesty and faithful discharge of duty. His life had been spent in doing conscientiously the work he had undertaken, and had never sunk into the common Slav habit of neglecting duty in order to dream of days of indolence and workless pleasures. His wife was a fit companion for him, for she matched him in her care for the deeds of the day, and with her husband had found happiness in making the best of life as it is. They had never considered they could make their life happier by morbidly envying the material riches of others. It was natural that they were psychologically unprepared for Bolshevism, the ideas of which they withstood with words of wisdom and calm. Unfortunately for the peace of the basement, the Bolsheviks were also opposed by the sewing maid and the housemaid. These two girls had temperaments which fitted in badly with the Bolshevik prospect of being equalised with the woman of the wash-tub and with the vodka-breathing yard-man. When the bomb shook the house, all these people with their much varied spirits were airing their views with much ardour in the kitchen. The explosion seemed to have immobilised them as thoroughly as the evil godmother's spell in the castle of the Sleeping Beauty, for when I arrived in the kitchen I found them all gaping at one another in utter bewilderment. The cook stood at the table with a mincing-chopper in his hand. A lump of raw meat was clasped by the other.

"*Sdrastvuitie*" (good-day), I said to them. "It has begun at last. I congratulate you. This house is one of the first to have a taste of Bolshevism."

None of them spoke. They were completely overcome, thunderstruck, I suppose I should say.

"This is your No. 5," I said to the cook. (Number 5 was the voting number of the Bolsheviks.) "It's promises of raising the lower classes are a little too personal. For one thing, their way of realising them has convinced me it is safest to get as low as possible. How much food have you laid in?"

The cook now realised that he was still among the living, and laid down his chopper and meat.

"I didn't think it would come to this," he faltered, crossing himself.

He went off to the larder and store-rooms to ascertain what provisions we could rely upon in case of a spell of civil war in the streets. The rest of the servants stood around with a look of dread on their faces. Their speech was confined to "Ohs" and "Ahs" and a few "How awfuls." One of them lit the small hanging-lamp before the ikon of the Mother of God. I left the kitchen in order to go to a corner-room upstairs in which was a small window. There was some likelihood of my being able to witness what was taking place in the street.

As I went out of the kitchen, I overheard the voice of the laundress, who, in tones of bitter animosity, announced how glad she was the day had come to kill off the cursed bourgeoisie. Her words were addressed to the domestics for my hearing: "They've drunk enough of our blood."

On my way upstairs I noticed a heap of vodka-bottles lying about in disorder in a corner.

"Whose bottles are those?" I asked of the footman, who came behind me.

"Those are what the laundress and the cook have drunk together," he answered.

The house was situated just off Tverskaya Street, one of the chief thoroughfares of Moscow and near to the House of the Governor General, in which the notorious Soviet and the Bolsheviks had their headquarters. The White Guards, the opponents of the Bolshevik Red Guards, were hidden

in many attics and houses. They were chiefly youthful cadets and students who, in the anxious days preceding the outbreak of hostilities, had banded together and dealt out firearms and ammunition in order to make a resolute stand for the Provisional Government. I was surprised later on to find that the number of experienced officers among them was decidedly small. They had cowered in their homes, and had left the dangerous work of defending their rights and honour to raw youths and a handful of heroes.

One officer was my companion in misfortune in the house during the hostilities, and although he was prolific in voicing the military programme and prospects of the White Guards, and breathed endless hopes for their success, he was of a mind that safety in the cellar was for the moment more desirable than a share in the fight. I was somewhat surprised to discover that the valour and dash of which he had formerly made proud and frequent boast, had forsaken him so suddenly, but he afterwards confessed to me that his part in the Great War had been the same as that of many thousands of Russian officers after the first few months of universal patriotism and entrainment. They had spent their time and money on women, wine, and cards behind the lines in what he termed "cosy places," while the peril and hard work of war was left to the fighting men. This sort of bourgeois Bolshevism was doubtlessly rampant in high places before it descended in its grosser form into the ranks.

I found the young officer in the corner-room. He, too, was bent on peeping out into the street. It was certainly not a place of safety, for, although there seemed little prospect of a second bomb coming our way, there was every possibility of stray bullets entering through the shattered windows. Indeed, but a few moments after my entrance into the room, a bullet flew through the window and lodged in the wall opposite. Shortly afterwards it was followed by an outpour of lead which riddled the walls of the room.

We were unable to stir. We crouched in a corner of the room, fearing every moment lest a bullet should rebound on us. How thankful we were when, during an interval, we were able to rush out of the room and get once more into safety. The maxim-guns were tapping incessantly and shot after shot resounded.

The attitude of the kitchen community had grown confident and courageous. The laundress had worked her talking speed up to its highest. She was holding forth to the community on the wrongs of this wicked world, which she and the Bolshevists were going to put right. I gathered from her violent remarks that in the good new days of Bolshevism she hoped to get as much vodka as she could drink. In her opinion the Tsar had lost his throne by forbidding the sale of vodka. She said that he had never before done so wicked an act. In the early days of the war, before she had made convenient acquaintances for the illicit purchase of vodka, she had been forced to drink eau-de-Cologne and methylated spirit. Thousands had been obliged to do so, and she had feared her lot would be the same as that of the miserable wretches who lay in the hospitals in terrible suffering through drinking all sorts of substitutes for vodka. To her mind, the Tsar, in stopping the sale of vodka, had taken away the soul of Russia. There was a chorus of approbation among the other domestics, who were evidently much touched at the vision of so many sufferings imposed upon the People, as the laundress was especially pleased to call the alcoholics.

Outside, the firing still went on unabated. For all of us it was a most anxious and stirring time. I had already experienced the February Revolution. But Bolshevism had made its appeal to the lowest of society and had enflamed in them the lowest passions. Not having the appearance of unwashed, uncombed, evil-smelling and evil-looking Bolshevists, there could be no doubt that in the event of a search the respectable inhabitants of the house

would be easily taken for "bourgeois," and as easily deprived of their belongings and perhaps of their lives. In Petrograd during the February Revolution it had been the common practice of unscrupulous soldiers to enter a flat under the pretext of searching for firearms and to carry off as many valuables as possible. No doubt the same soldiers had taken up Bolshevism with renewed energy and, after the long and loud stirring up of class hatred by the Bolshevik leaders, they would be less likely to have scruples about persons of property. Moreover, there was the danger of the street fighting continuing for many days, till even our abundant food supplies had given out. The outlook was so uncertain and unpleasant that I felt no surprise when the mistress of the house took her two children and lay prostrate in prayer and anguish before the holy ikon.

It was not an agreeable situation to have Bolshevism beating down civilisation with bomb and bullet outside, and to listen to it being blatantly fired at our ears by its noisy advocates indoors. But we had descended into sad depths by force of circumstances and deep was our cry from out of them. Even in the basement of our own home, our Bolshevik servants looked upon us as invaders and "parasites," whose place as bourgeois should be upstairs among the bombs and bullets.

We could do nothing but tolerate these annoyances with patience and resignation. The Bolsheviks had preached class-hatred so vigorously and successfully, that those who had drunk in its poison had become heartless and inhuman, filled with the spirit of Cain. There was one consolation for us in the fact that Bolshevism with its hatred was not the spirit of the Russian People, but was a cankerous growth which had been bred and fostered by evil-minded men for their own aims.

The butler and his wife, the housekeeper and the sewing and housemaids were splendid instances of what the true people are. Their kindness, good words, and deeds did

much to relieve our anxiety and weariness. Moreover the butler was endowed with a rich sense of humour, which helped him to look on life and all its miseries in a saving manner, whereas the Bolshevists looked on every happening and thing not profitable to them with hatred, envy and anger. With an abundance of humour, simple kindness and charity in our midst, we had much with which to neutralise and compensate for the evil-hearted outpourings of our indoor Bolshevists.

CHAPTER XII

THE NOVEMBER REVOLUTION (*continued*)

To be confined to a basement in the company of surly Bolsheviks is not a pleasant experience for the man who is keenly awake to distinctions of scents and sounds. There is little joy in having escaped a Bolshevik bomb to hear Bolshevik mouths belch out perpetually a torrent of invective, in which one figures as a bloodthirsty bourgeois and the possible ogre of millions of humble lives, and above all of the very people one houses, clothes, feeds, and pays. Yet such was the result of the Bolshevik propaganda of class-hatred. It killed in many hearts the faintest semblance even of brotherhood and human charity. The gospel of Cain had been preached with only too great success, and hate and envy made some unfortunate men and women more like snarling wolves and hideous hyenas than human beings.

For a long time the indoor Bolsheviks gave us no peace. At last an idea came into the head of the proprietor of the house, who, with his wife and two children, had taken refuge in the basement. He took out from his pocket a key, and holding it up before the household Bolsheviks said to them: "Here is a friend. Let us see if he cannot find you a better spirit." Thereupon he opened the door of the wine-cellar and brought out some bottles of cognac. The sight of the fiery liquid made the Bolsheviks forget their class-hatred and diatribes for the moment, and they readily accepted to drink a glassful from the bourgeois bottle.

After tasting the good liquid they were on their best behaviour, and by offering them a glassful from time to time the astute proprietor succeeded in procuring for us

a good measure of peace during the remainder of our confinement in the basement.

At great risk I went from time to time to the corner-room on the first floor. I looked out into the streets, I could see soldiers creeping along on scout duty. I did not know whether they were Bolsheviks or White Guards as neither wore any distinctive mark. All I saw were the same old khaki-coloured coats, such as I had seen in thousands, swaying to and fro to the beat of the soldiers' feet as they marched proudly and defiantly through the patriotic towns on leaving for the front to fight the national foe. Now I knew that the same coats covered men who had thrown down their arms in the face of their most formidable and pitiless enemy and had taken them up again only to turn them against their brothers-in-arms and fellow-countrymen. I felt the same shudder of horror and indignation as all patriotic Russia had felt when it became visibly true that Lenin, the arch-agent of Russia's foes, had succeeded in realising his diabolical plan of plunging the nation into a war of fratricide and treason. As I gazed, I saw soldier after soldier crouch down and glide along under the shelter of the walls. Just as one came to the road which opened out before the house I was gazing from, a volley of bullets came raining down from the attic of a house near by and a couple of soldiers tumbled down. I wondered whether they were Red or White Guards. One of them, after lying still for some time, got up suddenly and ran behind a pillar. In doing so he dropped his cap. He went back for it. As he came into the open roadway, more shots rang out, and he fell down in a heap. His hands lay outspread, and his face was deadly white. His enemies were not sure of his death, so they fired bullet after bullet into him as he lay. His companion scouts had taken refuge in our courtyard, and by the time I got down into the kitchen they had decided to remain in safety there till the end of hostilities. They were all young men, one of them being seventeen years old.

My first question to them was whether they were Red or White Guards. They turned out to be members of the notorious Reds. I had felt sorrow for the death of the soldier in the street, but now that I knew he was a traitor to his country and bent on murdering his brothers-in-arms, I could not suppress a feeling of gladness that his crime had met with its due.

The young Red Guards begged to be allowed to stay in the kitchen, as their revolutionary ardour had already subsided. The wounding of their comrade had broken down their confidence in their task. They had not been at the front, as they were quite fresh recruits. Bolshevism had attracted them, as it gave them the assurance of the war being ended and of their not being sent to the front. Nevertheless as Bolshevism had not been successful at the polls they had been called on to take their part in imposing it on the country by force of arms. One of them, a peasant youth of twenty years, declared he had no real desire to fight against the Provisional Government. He had joined the Bolsheviks because they had given and promised a handsome pay. I asked him if he had any grudge against the bourgeois.

"No, barin (master)," he answered. "The landowner in my village was an old countess, and she was the dearest soul we have ever known. We all loved her very much. She had a school and a hospital built for us, and on feast days we used to sing in front of her house. When our crops failed we were always sure of getting help from her. Only her steward was not always kind to us. He was a German, and we hated him."

"Don't you hate the Germans now?" I asked.

"No," he answered. "They are people just as we are. Our soldiers have been fraternising with them at the front. They won't do us any harm if we do them none."

I said to him: "You are ready to fraternise with the Germans, and yet you are not ashamed to carry this

horrible murderous war into the home of your own people."

"But we are better paid, barin," he answered.

"Yes," I said. "Lenin pays you better, because he had got the money from the Germans. It is not honest or Russian money."

"It is like this," he answered. "If I've got to fight I prefer to fight against the bourgeois than against the Germans. We can make peace with them, but we shall always have our bourgeois. When we have finished fighting against the Germans, we get our little money and go home. So it is better to beat the bourgeois and have all their riches. That is a better payment for fighting."

"That is robbery," I said to him. "If you get this house, for instance, what will you do with it?"

He looked about him for a few moments as though in doubt. "I should sell it," he said at last.

"Who would buy it?" I asked.

"I don't know," he answered. "No doubt a bourgeois."

I questioned all of them, but they seemed to look to the first as to a leader and spokesman. As far as practical politics were concerned, they could repeat all the promises of the Bolsheviks, and knew by heart all the phrases and declarations that had been launched among the masses by Bolshevik propagandists. They had very fixed ideas as to what they should destroy or do away with. They were out to do away with capitalism above all. They were out for the power of the Proletariat and for many other powers, but they had not the slightest idea of what should be done when capitalism was abolished or in what way they were going to make up for destruction. I gathered that their aims were to destroy the bourgeoisie and to get rich on the spoils. They had no care whatever for society or socialism in its real sense. I cannot say that they were unpleasant companions during the siege. It was evident that class hatred was more on their lips than in their hearts. They had still so much of the freshness of youth that the

evil ideas of unscrupulous propaganda had failed to make any deep wound in their natures. They were full of coarse jokes and wit. When I offered them tea, they thanked me in a bright and hearty manner.

Our own Bolsheviks, whose souls were marred by evil-thinking and living, having recovered from the charitable effects of the bourgeois cognac, thought of opening the war again. The young soldiers, however, speedily put an end to their attempt.

"Don't trouble, little mother," said one of them to the loud voiced laundress. "It is not a Russian custom to accept bread and salt with curses."

From immemorable times the Russians have always symbolised hospitality with bread and salt. It was gratifying to hear a young Bolshevik soldier recall to his fellow partisans the ancient traditions of the Russian nation. Though the Bolsheviks were determined to batter down everything that Russia held dear, it was clear that this young soldier's mind, at least, had not been utterly corrupted by them. I passed away many an hour during the siege in entertaining conversation with the young soldiers. Their minds were very fresh and their characters were still in their earliest stage of formation. Bolshevik as they were, they had none of the venom and villainy that breathed in the looks, words and deeds of their leaders.

I told them, time after time, I thought they would have made better use of their lives and guns if they had helped to keep the Germans from the door, but they met my reproaches with an air of indifference and indulgence. They had not been in the house long before another party of Bolshevik soldiers demanded admittance in order to carry out a search. They were warded off by the party we already had, as they told the new-comers they were doing the job themselves. Unfortunately for us, the visit of the other soldiers gave them some misgivings about the advisability of hiding in the house till the end of the fray.

They held a council amongst themselves, and after much talk and many motions, all made with a pretence of parliamentary procedure, they passed a resolution that having been discovered in their lair by brother Bolshevists, they had only one way out of their difficulty, and that was by going on with the fighting they had undertaken.

Accordingly, they decided to quit us. Before shouldering their rifles they asked for a farewell glass of tea and some cigarettes, both of which were given them at once. They bade us an affectionate and touching farewell, promising to do all in their power to protect our house from unfair treatment. Our hearts ached at the thought that they were real sons of Russia with open and generous hearts, for not all the poisonous outpourings of their foreign Bolshevist leaders had succeeded in destroying their natural goodness. To our great regret we saw no more of them alive, and two of them we afterwards discovered among the dead, exposed for recognition in one of the big halls of the town. And it was strange that they were not classed among the dead Red Guards, who were honoured with a Red burial amid Red ravings under the old Kremlin walls, but they lay among the killed civilians and White Guards and were buried together with them. Perhaps before their death they had thrown over the Bolshevist barbarians.

CHAPTER XIII

THE NOVEMBER REVOLUTION (*continued*)

THE first night of our siege was spent in attempts to accommodate the whole household with improvised beds in the basement. Bullets were pouring into the upper rooms, for the maxim guns of both parties were busily at work from neighbouring attics. With the young officer's aid I managed to bring down a few mattresses, which we spread out in the corner of the kitchen. The little ones, worn out with worry and fatigue, were soon fast asleep on them. For the grown-ups rest was impossible. One had scarcely stretched out one's tired limbs when knocks came to the door, which, on being opened, admitted a crowd of Bolshevik soldiers with rifles and revolvers. Their pretext for entering the house was always that of searching for fire-arms, as they declared that there had been firing from our house.

We were always sure of good treatment and a happy indulgence if the soldiers happened to be Russians, but when they were Letts we were treated to the full flavour of Bolshevik brutality. They poked us with their bayonets and ordered us to open all the cupboards and presses, into which, not troubling to search properly, they thrust their bayonets with malicious stabs. They carried off many small valuables which were lying about. We offered them tea and cigarettes, but they were too hostile to the bourgeoisie to accept anything from our hands. They preferred to make their own choice. No persuasion of words could bring them to discuss matters. They were typical Letts, bullet-headed, stubborn and brutal. They seemed to be animated with

the sole desire of doing as much harm as possible to the bourgeois. Each one had an uncontrollable lust to stab his bayonet into everything within reach. Their oaths were only too frequent and unpleasant to respectable ears. Once a band of them was headed by a stout surly fellow. He declared we had been shooting from the windows. We tried in vain to prove to him that we had been confined to the basement and had no guns or revolvers. He was determined not to believe. His tone and manner towards us suggested that he was commanding a gang of criminals.

"Give up your fire-arms," he bellowed.

"There is not a single fire-arm in the house," I said. "You may search all over the place. It has had half a dozen visits and searches already."

"Don't talk!" he bellowed, "our business is not to talk about fire-arms, but to get them."

"Look for them, then," I said.

"This very moment, hand them over," he roared.

"There are no——" I began, but he interrupted me and thundered:

"I order you to give up your fire-arms at once, or I shall arrest you."

Exasperated at his asinine stubbornness I called one of the small boys and said to him in English: "Go and get the red plush box on my table in the study."

It was a risky thing to send the boy upstairs, but he was brave and set off at once. When he brought down the box, I handed it to the surly Lett and said to him:

"This is the only weapon I have."

He took the box with a surly gesture and threw open the lid. Inside lay a small safety razor. He looked at it for a moment in bewilderment, then, with a coarse oath, he threw it down and crushed it under his heel. Thereupon in a rage he set about pulling open all the cupboards and drawers and slashed everything with his sword. He insisted on going upstairs with his men, although everyone

warned him of the danger. He went on his mad search with a torrent of oaths and curses on the bourgeois.

Presently among the noise and clatter he was making overhead we suddenly heard a cry and a thud. Soon his men came down and told us he had been struck by a bullet from the street. They brought him downstairs and laid him on the mattress in the corner of the kitchen. His life was fast ebbing. We did all we could for him, but there was no hope of keeping him for this world. The landlady showed him an ikon, but he made a wry face, and muttering something about a "cursed bourgeois," gave up the ghost. The body was left on our hands, for the soldiers hastily betook themselves away without troubling to end their search for fire-arms. We were in a most unpleasant situation. Our already numerous household overcrowded the small basement, yet we were obliged to make room for an unwelcome corpse. The children especially objected to it as a bedfellow. It was the first Bolshevik death they had witnessed in their lives and were filled with a haunting dread. It was decided at last that the presence of the corpse would be intolerable to the whole household, and in the morning the coachman dug a grave in the courtyard and buried it.

Luckily we had no more deaths in the house, although some hard-pressed White Guards rushed into our yard for refuge, and were cut down by some Bolshevik soldiers, who were manipulating a machine-gun from a neighbouring roof. Their bodies were afterwards removed by the Red Cross cart, which found an opportunity after the first day of hostilities to drive through the streets and collect the dead and wounded. Two, three days went by and still the dreadful battle went on. All touch with the outside world was lost save for the visits of searching Red Guards.

One batch of them swooped down upon us with a great array of rifles and revolvers. Luckily they turned out to be Russians, and young Orthodox peasant soldiers. They

did not subject us to any indignities. They drank the tea we offered them and were heartily grateful, as they had had nothing to eat or drink for two days. One of them asked for a comb and a mirror, which, when brought, he took and gazed into for some minutes in complacent admiration of his youthful features. He took the comb and parted his hair with much ado. When he was satisfied about its appearance, he handed back comb and mirror, saying: "If I die, I shall at least have a good forelock." The bushy and elegant state of his forelock was practically all that he cared about in life. When I asked him why he was troubling to fight for the Bolshevists, he replied that as he could not escape having to fight for someone he thought the best bargain was to fight for those who promised the most profit. He had little or no notion of morality. He had the same materialism that characterises the Russian when the thin veneer of outward religion crumbles away. Personal profit was his only motive in dealings and doings. Like many Russian soldiers I have spoken to he could not understand what was meant by fighting for an ideal. He did not understand fighting against the Germans for the fatherland. The fatherland was something too ideal. He knew what he was fighting for under the Bolshevists, as he was to have his share of the riches he saw about him among the bourgeois. Yet, strange to say, side by side with this gross materialism he had sufficient unconscious idealism in him to make him risk his life for a promise that was still a long way from being realised.

Once we heard someone knocking at the door with the butt-end of his rifle. A voice, anything but heavenly, called out, "Open!" When the door was opened a tall man, followed by soldiers, stalked in with the air of a hero entering a captured citadel. He cast his pale grey eyes round the room, and, holding the hilt of his sword, called out in tones of thunder: "Bring out your weapons!"

We had been so often called upon to deliver up the

weapons we did not possess that we were thoroughly accustomed to the scene. We denied having any weapons in the house. The Bolshevist leader rested his pale grey eyes upon us for a moment in absolute silence and then, turning solemnly round to the men who stood behind him, vociferated the order :

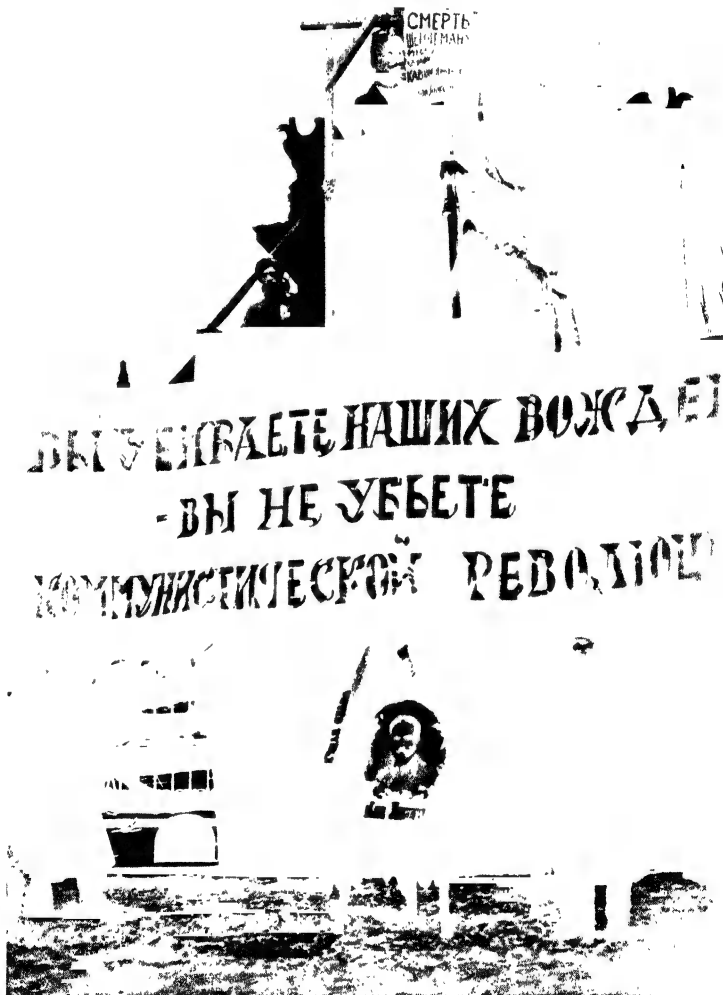
“ Search the house ! ”

His men at once set about making a thorough search. They pulled all the mattresses up from the floor and stabbed them through and through with their bayonets. When they had finished in the basement and wine cellar, where they insisted on smashing some wine bottles in hopes of finding some unearthly fire-arm corked up in them, they betook themselves upstairs. Before going up the stairs, the leader turned to one of his men and called out : “ Guard the door ! ” Satisfied that we were not likely to escape he proceeded with his men upstairs. The man he had stationed at the door was a young soldier, with kind, blue eyes and curly hair. I asked him who the man was with the Napoleonic manners. He said he was a great Bolshevist leader, a man who had spent many years in Paris and Geneva, whither he had escaped from the mines of Siberia, to which he had been sent for life, for having murdered some political enemies and blown a policeman to pieces with a bomb. I could not imagine a more unpleasant and nauseously nasty an individual. The young soldier became very talkative and agreed that the leader was not a lovable man. I asked him why, after abolishing the officers, he allowed himself to be domineered and ordered about by that criminal. The poor fellow could not answer. Like many others, he had not realised he had merely changed his masters.

In the meantime the search in the upper apartments had not revealed the presence of fire-arms. The escaped criminal came down with his following of men. He was not in a good humour at not finding the state of affairs as he wished it. His wild eyes glared with all the fire of a famished

wolf's. He was not in bodily want. He was well fed and healthy, but had the pinched looks of a spirit-burdened fanatic. From his manner and tone of voice, it was obvious his thoughts and desires had all flowed in the narrow channels of hatred and envy. He had the personality of a stubborn-willed man, such as can command a crowd of weaklings with the power of his intense hatred, when the gentler claims are left without an echo in their hearts. He was a real demagogue, stirring up the demon in men in the name of God and calling evil things by honest names. Never could a man have shown greater vexation than when he returned from his fruitless search for fire-arms. His big frame appeared in the doorway, surrounded by his men with their heavy rifles. Lifting up a well-poised arm and pointing a finger at us, he ordered in stentorian tones :

“ Arrest the men ! ” There was a swift movement among the soldiers and some of them seized the young officer and myself by the arms. “ To Headquarters ! ” the Bolshevik leader commanded. Half-dragged and half-pulled, we were escorted to the house of the Governor-General on the Skobelievskaya Square, near by, where the notorious chief Soviet and the Bolshevik leaders were installed.



OFFICIAL PUBLIC HANGING AND BURNING IN EFFIGY OF SCHEIDEMANN, THE LEADER OF THE GERMAN SOCIALISTS.
Facing Page 158]

CHAPTER XIV

UNDER ARREST

THERE was a noisy gathering of individuals in the room at the Bolshevists' Headquarters, to which we were conducted. Luckily, the shooting in the streets in the immediate neighbourhood had considerably diminished, as the Bolshevists had succeeded in almost silencing opposition in the central quarters of the town. There were still a number of White Guards in hiding, and their bullets whizzed about from most unexpected quarters. Some shots helped us along our way to the Soviet, luckily without harm, although a couple of bullets buzzed past my ears and brought the cement down from the wall of a house. The Bolshevist leader ordered us to be taken before a committee of rough-looking men in military dress, who were seated at a table and examining the people that had been brought in by zealous Bolshevists to clear up suspicions about their identity and purpose. The young officer and I were taken before the table, and the Bolshevist escaped criminal stated his suspicions of our hostility to Bolshevism, spitting his words out with a great hissing of s's. He made a pretty black case against us. He said shooting from our windows had been noticed and search after search had failed to reveal any fire-arms. He contended that the presence of the officer in the house was damning. Our papers and purses were taken away and we were escorted out into a large room at the back of the building. There we discovered a company of some forty persons and collegians who, like ourselves, had fallen under suspicion and were being detained in

Bolshevist custody. Happily the spirit among them was not depressed, and although many of them entertained great doubts about their ultimate security, they forgot much of their woe in a free and hearty exchange of sentiments and views about the civil war and the future of Russia.

It was somewhat disheartening to witness the apathy and indifference into which several of the officers had fallen, owing to the indignities that had been heaped upon them, since Kerensky's jump-out upon the military world with his notorious list of Soldiers' Rights. They had been surrounded with suspicion and distrust from that moment. Indeed, theirs had been a lot more hard to bear, for besides being the butt of the soldiery, who had made it a practice to impress rudely upon the officers their assumption of equal rights with them, their lives ran a constant risk at the hands of the men, whom unaccustomed liberty and fanatics had encouraged to run amok. In many cases the barbarity of the licentious soldiers and sailors made one's hair stand on end. In Sebastopol tens of naval officers were thrown into the sea and drowned by their liberty-drunk crews. Some officers of the Baltic fleet were even thrown alive into the ships' boilers. The treatment meted out to the captive officers by the Soldier and Sailors' Councils in Kronstadt would make a Dahomi chief pale with horror. Small wonder, therefore, that their outlook on Russian politics and life in general was of the gloomiest and most despairing. One of them, a good-looking young man of about 23 years, who told me about his remarkable deeds at the front, confided to me that he had on him a small poisonous powder, which he intended to swallow should he be subjected to the indignities and monstrous treatment that had been heaped upon other unfortunate officers by the worst elements of the Bolshevist soldiery.

All the intelligentsia among us were decided that M. Kerensky was the chief man to blame for the ruin of Russia. They called him a weak-willed fop and "carrieriste," to

whom personal power and the acclamations of crowds were more at heart than duty either to crowd or country. Curiously enough, we had among us a young gentleman, who, despite evident lack of wits, or perhaps because of that, had been associated with M. Kerensky as aid to one of his Ministers. He was a friend of Kerensky, who, as a matter of course, had presented him with his high position. The young fellow could not have been older than twenty-eight, yet his bleary eyes, beatific smile and degenerate brow were canopied with a slippery wig, which gave its owner as much trouble as his efforts to look ministerially big. I had met him just a few days before the outbreak of hostilities. I had been invited to a dinner at the house of a much-moneyed and little-moralled Moscow magnate.

Among the officers in custody were a few whose military valour had not risen above nursing a comfortable staff job, which in proportion to its fighting insignificance and leisurely safety had swelled them up with haughty self-consciousness. They were very indignant at being arrested by the Bolsheviks, as they unceasingly pointed out that they had not stirred a finger in the revolution either for or against the Bolsheviks and were anxious only to quit the country (with their riches and revenues) for the impartial peace of Switzerland or Japan. It was far from edifying to witness their lack of spirit. They could not find a glimmer of animation in their hearts either for their country or for any ideal. I thought that even their Bolshevik guards put them to shame, for they manifested a zeal and energy that might have honoured a better cause. Miserable lamentations for their present discomfiture took up all the staff officers' energies, except when, in moments of hope, they indulged whole-heartedly in voluble conversations about wine and women, which seemed all they were likely to fight for.

They were typical sons of the Moscow merchant class, gross egotists and crassly ignorant. Aspiring to omniscience, they dismissed the ideas of God, religion, morality and

practical patriotism as exploded fallacies and chauvinistic prejudices. I offered them some cigarettes, which they accepted with thanks. I struck a match in order to give them a light. I offered it to two officers and wishing to be economical, offered it to a third, but he knocked it out of my hand with a rough blow and rose up in his wrath to such a point that I thought he was going to knock me down too. I had stirred his soul to its very depths. Outside, the Bolsheviks were blowing Russia into bits. He did not care.

Some of the arrested collegians spoke English and begged me to enliven them with "It's a long way to Tipperary," I sang it through in a mangled manner, but it delighted them and inspired them to give me a cheer.

Shortly afterwards, some soldiers brought us some good bread and rich creamy butter. Soup and meat were also brought, and we were happy to make a hearty meal off these luxuries, despite the anxiety of our hearts.

Great was my surprise, when Badkin, the sailor-orator and would-be replacer of Kerensky, was brought in to share our numerous company. He looked crest-fallen and had little to say beyond expressing fears that the Bolsheviks were gaining the victory and that he expected to be shot. He conferred a long time with his friend of the slippery wig. Some time later he was taken out by the guards and we saw him no more. After the revolution it turned out that he had bribed his guard, changed his sailor's clothes and had made his escape to the Don. He was doomed, however, to die at Bolshevik hands, for ten months later he was caught and shot by them as a dangerous counter-revolutionary.

Towards evening I was summoned before some Bolshevik officials for further examination. Imagine my surprise when I discovered that the man in the chair was the very ruffian who had killed the watchman at the factory of one of my friends a couple of years back and had been "wanted" by the police ever since. I mentioned to him the name of my friend and how life among his workers was far from

monotonous. He took the matter up with heated enthusiasm and vigorously asserted that the workers' very blood had been sucked by my bourgeois and capitalist friend, on whom he bestowed a couple of curses amid an avalanche of oaths. Seated among the mighty of the new Bolshevik dominion, he proudly and majestically waved me out to freedom and home. "*Stnpai!*" (Get thee hence) he ordered.

CHAPTER XV

PEACE BELLS

It was the fourth day of the fighting in Moscow. Shells and bombs were still hurled about in various quarters of the town. When I got out into the streets I was surprised to find a comparative calm in the neighbourhood. Gun-fire was still heard from the direction of the Kremlin. The Bolshevists had already succeeded in battering down one of the Kremlin gates. The chief Soviet now issued its papers with news of the progress of the fight. In glowing terms they described their victories and assured the proletariat that the death-knell of the White Guards and middle classes had already rung. The buildings in the streets I passed through were riddled with bullets. Blood-stains marked the spots where many a poor soul had breathed its last. Sisters of mercy were going about with Red Cross men to pick up and care for the wounded. I saw several being brought on stretchers from the distant streets where fighting still continued. They were mostly young Bolshevists, whose ghastly pallor and outstretched flapping arms stood clear in my memory for many days.

Before entering my home, I paid a visit to the hospital opposite. The beds were full of wounded Bolshevists who had been brought in from the neighbouring streets. Many were lingering on the verge of death. An Orthodox priest was at the bedsides. I was present at the death of a strapping young Bolshevist soldier, who was suffering terribly. The priest brought him the Holy Sacrament, which he received after confession with reverence and a look of comfort. When the priest gave him the cross to kiss, his large blue

eyes filled with tears and his pale lips faltered the prayer : " Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner." I think he forgot his sufferings in the *attendrissement* of his heart before the picture of the crucified Saviour, for he begged the priest to keep it before his eyes. The priest held it there and from time to time put it to the dying man's lips. Each time he kissed it with tenderest devotion. Just before his soul left the body he took the priest's hand and said :

" I have fought against my brothers. The Bolsheviks taught me to hate. The Saviour teaches us to love. Too late, too late, I have learnt that love saves the world."

Tears once more veiled the big blue eyes, and the lips faltered a word they could not pronounce. The priest tried to console and comfort the dying man, but his soul passed away after he had succeeded in articulating the words, " one must love, not hate."

The priest told me he had attended many death-beds in the hospital, and he was most happy to be able to say that most had been Christian ones. The venom of Bolshevik class hatred had not corrupted the soldiers too thoroughly.

Many horrifying crimes were brought to light when the wounded Bolsheviks were undressed. One soldier had in his pocket several ladies' hands with blood-bespattered rings and jewels. Another had a collection of watches, which he had probably purloined while searching private dwellings for fire-arms. Several had on them enormous fortunes in money. Such were the soldiers Lenin made use of to help him in abolishing the principle of private property !

On the morning after my return home I was surprised to hear the bells of a neighbouring church ring out joyfully. Everyone in the house thought peace had been declared. Rushing to the window, we were surprised to see a procession about to form in front of the church. The priests were at the head of it in their gorgeous robes, and people were carrying out of the church the holy ikons and banners. It was a very beautiful scene and brought relief to the

eyes after scenes of blood and hatred, just as the sound of the bells with their message of love and peace was a thankful change from the boom of cannon and the hiss of bullets with their mission of death. I tried to persuade the house to join the procession, which I ascertained was to implore the fighters to cease hostilities, but the Bolshevist members declared they would not take part in it on principle. Together with the pious and courageous housekeeper, I joined the procession.

A body of about two hundred people had assembled to accompany the holy ikons through the blood-stained streets. Many people showed their faces at the windows of the houses and crossed themselves repeatedly as though very heartily wishing for the success of the procession for peace. There was a look of anxiety and earnest resolve on every face as, God alone knew, some barbarous Bolshevist might put a machine in action against the manifestants. With the bells pealing out in the cold crisp air and the pale sun of autumn glinting in the gold of the ikons and robes of the priests, amid the swinging of the fuming censers and with the mournful chanting of a church-song of repentance, the procession moved forward in high hopes. We passed along one street and turned into another which led to the Tverskaya and the head Soviet. Blessings were showered down on the procession from every window. It was the heart of all Moscow that moved with it and found expression in its message of peace and brotherly love.

When the procession reached the Tverskaya street, it was stopped by Bolshevist Lett soldiers, who bellowed out something about the futility of "dragging out Christ and all these old superstitions." One dapper little Jewish officer, doing control work for the Bolsheviks in the now peaceful parts, attempted to be facetious, and said we had turned up two thousand years too late. All our appeals to be allowed to pass through the chief streets were met with flat refusal, and it looked very much as though the Maxim

guns would be put into use. A Bolshevik leader who came up ordered the procession to return to the church, as he announced the Church had nothing to do in the matter.

"Take your gods back into their holes," he shouted, "they've no business here. We're not fighting for the Kingdom of Heaven."

Realising that persistence was useless, the priests and people retraced their steps and held a touching and devout service of intercession in the church. The bells were now silent. Again the booming of cannon was heard.

I paid a visit to the parish priest at his house. He was a grey-haired and venerable veteran of the Church Militant. He was a staunch friend of the Allies, but regretted that since the February Revolution they had betrayed a fateful ignorance of Russian political life and psychology. He deeply deplored the fact that England provided Russia with greedy, egotistic business-men and easy-going, dallying diplomats. He was well versed in English political life, and with his exact and detailed knowledge of British institutions could put many an Englishman to shame. Patriotic Russian intelligentsia, as opposed to the more numerous unprincipled and unpatriotic intelligentsia, had a worthy representative in him. He considered, with many others of his mind, that the demoralisation and humiliation of Russia was primarily due to German advanced thought, which, through the channel of the faithless Russian intelligentsia, had found its most forceful expression in out-and-out Bolshevism. He acknowledged that the Bolsheviks did not mince matters. If they held an idea for truth, they were ready to bomb the rest of the world in support of it. This he held of the Bolshevik leaders, but of the Bolshevik soldiers he could only say that they were either simple souls led astray or the worst elements of society on the war-path for loot and murder. He descried in Bolshevism the self-begotten punishment of the egotistical, atheistic intelligentsia who, having too voraciously and

injudiciously imbibed German materialistic learning, had sown the seeds of degeneracy and demoralisation in the people and were now reaping the whirlwind. Discarding the prudence of evolutionary development, they had aimed at stirring up the dark masses to revolution. Of their own knowledge and enlightenment they had made evil use, for all the attempts of the old régime to enlighten the dark masses by a system that would not instil the venom of demoralisation had been perverted by them into a veiled form of revolutionary and moral-crippling propaganda. To his mind the diplomats England sent out to Russia were not of the same breed as she sent to India, where he thought England had shown her power and perspicacity in government by keeping order in a country that, like Russia, was at any loosing of the reins likely to run amok. He did not blame the Russian peasants, who were the backbone and majority of the nation, but he was full of reproach regarding the unprincipled and disaffected intelligentsia who, without faith either in God or the Devil, tried to pass on their discontent and unsettledness in life to the more solid and peaceful population.

The views he expressed coincided with those I had heard from Russians of the patriotic pattern. When I repeated them to a representative of the advanced intelligentsia, he assured me that the old priest was biassed by his purse, which of late years had greatly diminished in bulk with the increase of unbelief. I was loath to credit the insinuation, as I knew the critic was a true representative of his class, whose only criterion in all matters save art was the grossly materialistic one of economic necessity.

I left the priest after a long and entertaining conversation. His parting words to me were :

“ I sincerely hope for the victory of the Allies and the triumph of the ideals which they are fighting for. Every true Russian is a lover of freedom and justice. We have proved that in our wars for the liberty of oppressed peoples

and in our spirit of tolerance for other religions. Bolshevism is of German breed and Lenin has brought it to Russia from Germany, and with the German way of the mailed fist intends to enslave us under it. Bolshevism is the Beast," he added, waving a finger of warning and shaking the long loose sleeves of his cassock. "It is the Beast. Its people are not people, they are beasts."

As if to punctuate what he said, a Bolshevik bomb exploded against the open belfry, a shower of white plaster and cement falling upon us. As if by a miracle we were not hurt. The prophetic priest hastily sought the safety of his inner rooms, while I went out to hasten home through whatever bombs the Bolshevik Beast might care to hurl about. I found out afterwards that the occasional burst of a shell in remote quarters was owing to the close-firing inexperience of the Bolshevik soldiers, who sighted their guns for upper storeys, but sent their shells over the roofs into peaceful quarters. The killing of a household or two was nothing to Lenin or his satellites! They were abolishing capitalism and middle-class prejudices.

CHAPTER XVI

AFTER THE FIGHT

At last the day came when the White Guards had to acknowledge their defeat. Their General declared he could hold out no longer. Lenin had called up Red regiments from other towns and some of them had entered Moscow to aid the Bolshevist. No aid for the White Guards was forthcoming from any quarter. An armistice was signed after six days' fighting, and terrified Moscow was enabled to creep out from its holes and hiding-places. Most people made a rush for the food stores, as they were literally starving. Tongues that had trembled with terror during the siege now told their tales with returned energy in the crowded streets. Although Bolshevism had triumphed there was time and place for breathing. A sigh of relief arose from Moscow.

For three days people did nothing but tramp the streets to view the enormous damage that had been caused by bombs and bullets to buildings. Scarcely a window-pane was intact. As you walked along the pavement, you trod on a mosaic carpet of broken glass. Blood-stains were only too numerous. The sign-boards of the shops were so riddled by machine-gun bullets, that they looked like sieves.

A great crowd gathered about the walls of the ancient Kremlin, the great gates of which had suffered irreparably from the Bolshevist bombs. The historic churches inside the Kremlin had also suffered. The Patriarch's vestry had been blown in and the Bolshevist soldiers had made havoc among its priceless historical and artistic treasures, many of which

had been carried off without a trace. All intellectual Moscow was horrified at the destruction which the Bolsheviks had wrought upon the most cherished historical edifices of the nation. So great was the murmur of indignation that the Bolsheviks placarded the town with proclamations, in which they scoffed at the prejudices of people "who shed crocodile tears over the damaging of a few lumps of stone, while they eye with indifference and contempt the sufferings and death of thousands of human beings, whom they drive into battle." All they purposely forgot to add was that, in any killing that was undertaken the Bolsheviks were the first to set about it, with as much consideration for humanity as their zeal for throwing bombs would include.

Religious Moscow and, above all, the populace, was stirred with the deepest indignation at the sight of so many desecrated churches. Greater than all was the wrath of the pious proletarians and peasants at the ruthless destruction of the ikon of St. Nicholas over the Nikolsky Gate in the Kremlin. There an enormous gathering of people contemplated the ruin of a holy painting that was particularly venerated as having escaped destruction during the invasion of Napoleon in 1812. A tablet beneath the image stated that it had been miraculously preserved when the rest of the gate had been shattered.

Like all people with something to impose by force, the Bolsheviks show ruthless contempt for the delicacy of their victims' feelings. To blow out an opponent's brains is the first degree of Bolshevik argument. Small wonder, then, that the Bolsheviks had nothing but bombs for the stone temples of God, who is down on their programme for abolition as a relic of superstition.

Thousands of people gazed for hours on the shattered image of St. Nicholas. It was obvious that a great blow had been struck at the very heart of Orthodox Russia. Many were the searches for chips of the ikon among the

litter at the foot of the gate. I saw some peasants in sheepskins who made constant bows and crossed themselves frequently before the ikon. I overheard one express his indignation. "Godless villains!" he muttered. "They have destroyed our holy ikon. St. Nicholas will punish them. They are the Antichrist." He wagged his long-haired grey head and went on. "We shall not obey them, though they come with rich presents in their hands, the godless ones!"

They went into a small chapel near by and lighted some wax tapers before the ikons. When they had finished their crossing and bowing they came out and cast their eyes again at the ruined image. Then with much muttering, tugging of beards and wagging of long-haired white heads they plodded off in their brown sheepskin skirts. Their candles were consoling St. Nicholas for Bolshevik ill-usage, but they were hieing them to the country to take their part in the Bolshevik sharing-out of the landowners' confiscated property.

Some Bolshevik guards of Lett nationality were placed by the gate to keep order. They made fun of the people's piety in their unpoetic language and provided themselves with thrilling fun by firing blank cartridges from time to time, so that the people took fright and dispersed like sheep.

Several large edifices had taken fire during the bombardments. Their ruins sent up clouds of smoke for many days. One of the most horrible sights was the long row of victims' bodies, to the number of fifteen hundred, which were exposed for identification in a big building. The queue of people waiting to seek for missing relatives and friends was enormous. When hostilities broke out, lots of peaceful pedestrians had been mowed down by the Bolsheviks with their machine-guns. Heart-rending were some of the stories told by people who had survived tremendous dangers, or who were called upon to mourn the loss of a relative or friend. One young lady acquaintance of mine was killed by

a Bolshevik. She had approached a window of her home in order to satisfy her curiosity about what was taking place in the street, and a Bolshevik guard, catching sight of her white dress, fired straight at her, the bullet passing through her stomach. She died in great pain.

Another lady I knew was reading in her boudoir quite far from the window. Although her flat was on the fourth floor, a bullet flew in and carried off the top of her skull. She died immediately.

The barbarities of the Bolsheviks in their treatment of captive White Guards is scarcely imaginable. I met many sad mothers, shrouded in black, who mourned their young sons, boys of sixteen or seventeen years, pupils of military colleges, whom the Bolshevik soldiers had taken out and shot for sport and spite. One lady had lost three officer sons at the front and the Bolsheviks had foully murdered her youngest and last, a cadet of sixteen. When I saw her her eyes were filled with a sad light and her voice had a note of melancholy resignation, yet she told me she had decided not to grieve for her lost sons.

“My heart is rent,” she said, “by the knowledge that the noble land for which my sons fought and sacrificed their lives has fallen a prey to barbarous Letts and intriguing Jews.”

In general the intelligentsia and most of the people were plunged in despair. The country had been in a chaotic state before the Bolsheviks; now they could only look forward to greater disorder, murders and rapine in the name of Bolshevik ideals. There was great jubilation among the Bolshevik civil population, who, after seeing how the work of beating down the old Government had been done for them by the soldiery, crept out of their homes with eyes aglare and hearts agog for the promised distribution of property among the “dowerless.”

CHAPTER XVII

THE NEW LIFE

THE funeral of the dead White Guards was a very touching and beautiful ceremony. Thousands of Muscovites followed the numerous coffins to the cemetery. They were buried with all the beautiful rites of the Russian Church. Many people wept when the choir and crowds chanted the prayer, "Eternal memory." As the mournful procession wended its way through the streets the first snow of winter fell and covered the coffins and the streets with a white pall. The heavens had indeed reason to weep white tears for the sons of real Russia, for they have given their youthful lives in an heroic defence of Russia's very soul, against the ruthless onslaught of men who were determined most of all to root out of the hearts of the people all that had made them truly Russian in the past.

Never was the anti-Russian mind of the murderers more truly depicted than at the funeral of the dead Red Guards. The Soviet had ordered that they should be buried in the Red Square in the shadow of the Kremlin walls, which they had so irreverently bombarded. There was a riotous display of red ribbons and rags on the day of their burial. Brass bands blurted out revolutionary music; rows of ribald soldiery, some drunk with victory, some with vodka, paced forward with loaded rifles; armed factory workers, not remote from the Apache type, and screeching girls howled the Bolshevik battle-song, "Arise, arise, ye toiling folk!" to the tune of the "Marseillaise"; red banners with calls to class hatred were borne aloft. Somewhere in the midst of all these

screaming bands, colours and folk and among the spikes of the rifles was a number of red coffins. Not a tear was to be found in any eye, nor yet a sigh on any lips. All that was heard was the blustering of the bands, the flapping of the red banners, the coarse shouts of the soldiers and the harsh war-whoop of the Bolshevik men and women in their trappings of red, blood-red. Never before had men been carried to their graves amid such a bacchanalia of riotous egotism. There was no thought for the dead: there was only room for the roar of the Red. Raving orators, knitting their brows and gnashing their teeth, poured out words of exultant anger and hatred at the gravesides. Not a tear was shed, not a prayer was said.

The bands bluster out once again, the soldiers shout, the Red men and women roar and off they all march. Their rowdy roaring still swells up from the distance. As the shades of night begin to fall, a couple of weeping women in black glide up to the great grave. With them comes a priest. They pause at a certain spot and the priest recites a few prayers. They are soon over and the women depart with a happier and calm expression in their tear-stained eyes.

Religious Moscow that night heard the wailing of the Bolshevik dead. They had been buried without the blessing of the Church and were not at rest. Certainly, if they did wail at all it was because they had been buried like dogs by whooping savages. Later, some pious relatives of the buried had dirges sung at the grave, but till this day the Bolshevik authorities refuse to allow an emblem of religion to be displayed there.

When the Bolsheviks had buried their dead they immediately set about bringing society down to their ideals. Almost their first action was to let all the criminals out of prison. The Bolshevik creed had taught them that criminals are the victims of middle-class society and prejudices. Lenin taught them that morality is a middle-class idea, invented for the support of capitalism and private

property. "Do away with both," he said, "and morality is no longer necessary." So, as soon as Bolshevism came into power, the Bolshevist mob, abolishing at a blow the prejudice of morality, threw open the doors of the prisons, that the criminal, like the seven sleepers, might appear in the world once again and find it greatly changed. As the Bolshevist leaders had always professed a tender regard for criminals, or shared their mentality in disowning morality, there must have been much rejoicing in their quarter. Not so in the various quarters of Moscow town at night. Bands of liberated ruffians roamed the streets and expressed in a tangible manner their strong approval of Bolshevist abolition of morality and private property. Being still more consequential and nearer eternal truth than their Bolshevist leaders they adopted a more cogent "Back to Nature" policy, and with a battering in of skulls and blowing out of brains levelled in the only true and final equality a vast number of unsuspecting victims. It was dangerous to walk in the streets after dusk. Even the broad principal thoroughfares, where mirthful youth and insouciance had paraded and jostled with wise old age and tranquil care, were forsaken by their crowds as if by magic after sundown. Between six and eight o'clock were the most dangerous hours. The liberated "victims of defunct middle-class morality," wrapt in the shades of night, came out of their dens with knives and daggers and revolvers to impose their views and lights upon a renovated society. When Moscow crept out of doors under the shield of broad daylight, it found the streets dotted with blood-stained corpses. The ferocious appetites that Lenin had loosed were not satisfied with night operations. Bands of brigands in soldiers' uniforms rushed about the town in stolen or "requisitioned" motor-cars and held up people to "socialise" their property, or swooped down upon shops, even in the Tverskaya, to loot and carry off all they could carry. Small battles were fought and the number of killed or wounded was not small,

but the Bolshevist brigands always got away safely, as their Bolshevist brothers, the soldier police, were loath to interfere with men who carried on much the same business as themselves. Sporadic firing was the order of the day.

I was walking along the Tverskaya Street one day about noon when I heard a lady scream and people shout behind me. I looked round and saw a well-dressed woman struggling in the hands of four or five soldiers. One had her fur coat and another her satchel, while a third was taking off her boots. Other soldiers were standing in a motor-car. They held in their hands cocked rifles, which they pointed threateningly at the gathering crowd. When they had finished their work, the looting soldiers dropped the lady on to the pavement and jumped into the car, which immediately moved away. The armed soldiers held the rifles in readiness all the time. When the car was at some distance, a couple of Bolshevist soldier-policeman opened fire upon the brigands. Of course they hit nobody, but wounded a cab horse which was standing by a door. The brigands returned the fire and succeeded in killing a passing woman and wounding two men. The public usually suffered more than either the brigands or the Bolsheviks.

I was one day taking tea at the Café Pittoresque on the Kuznetsky Most. A good number of well-known people were present and I could not fail to notice a company of gesticulating Jews, among whom sat the notorious Jewish banker and speculator, Rein. I had just passed the remark to my friend that the national misery was not reflected in the wealthy Jews' fat paunches and flabby diamond-decked hands, and that their fabulous profiteering confirmed their racial capacities for making money out of misery, when the street door was suddenly flung open and a body of armed soldiers rushed in. They shouted in a loud coarse voice as they pointed their rifles and revolvers: "Hands up, or we'll shoot!"

Half the Jewish company fainted on the spot. It was a
Md

ludicrous contrast to see the fat paunches that had quivered and the flabby hands that had paraded their glittering diamonds, lying helpless on the floor, while the sensuous lips were mute and the black eyes were still.

The soldiers began to search the pockets of everyone in the room. Resistance was impossible. The speculator, Rein, had to yield up his purse and pocket book, which contained 750,000 roubles (£30,000 at that time)! Similar enormous sums were taken from the other Jews. When they discovered their money was being taken indeed, they recovered from their swoon in good time to put in a torrent of words in defence of their vanishing valuables.

When the soldiers had gathered a huge fortune, they took leave with an effusion of thanks, and left a few leaflets by Lenin on the abolition of private property under Communism. The Russian gentlemen, who had been robbed, waved their hands as a sign of fatalism. Rein, however, assured the company jocosely, that he would get all his money back in a few days. He went out, called a cab and drove off to the Exchange.

The frequency of robberies and murders was the chief subject of conversation in the talking world. Few people had no adventure to relate. People were so afraid of incursions into their homes that it became necessary to close the hall-doors and enter the houses by the back entrance and gain access into the flats by the kitchen door. "Entrance by the back door across the yard," was the notice stuck on all front doors. Even that precaution did not set to rest the fears of the householder. After stumbling up dark staircases, one knocked at the back door only to hear a tremulous voice call out: "Who's there?" On recognition of the voice, the inside person would unbolt and unbar the door by very cautious degrees.

I went to an evening party at a house near the Kremlin. There was a gay company despite the stalking spectre of Bolshevism. It was made up of young officers and ladies

and gentlemen of the best society of Moscow. They were all convinced that Bolshevism was an importation from Germany. One old Professor of Archæology, of antique but venerable appearance, and views was loud and persistent in his assertion that Bolshevism was a tremendous effort on the part of the International Jews to bring ruin upon the nations, that they might sit in judgment over them. He quoted the Jewish names of all the new Bolshevik Commissaries.

“ You see,” he said, clutching me sharply by the arm, and thrusting his bespectacled nose very close to my ear, “ the Russian Jews hate the very name of Russia. They will not be satisfied until they deprive Russia of any power to withstand their machinations. The antagonism between Holy Russia and the Jew is purely spiritual. We want to keep the soul of our country intact. The Russian Jew has no soul, no religion. He does not honour his own Ten Commandments, which are excellent religion, but he has a lust to break other people’s gods and work for the ruin of their nation, as his own is in ruin. They still worship the golden calf, and are skilful and shameless in organising vice for profit.”

As there were two persons present whose parents were Jews, I felt some discomfiture at the old Professor’s words. I suppose they felt themselves too Russian, or were too busy flirting, to give heed to the musings of white-haired wisdom. I passed from the Professor’s conversation to that of a young officer, who had recently given up celibate war work at the front to blossom forth into a tender and devoted young husband. He claved to his beautiful wife, with scriptural fidelity and followed her with a faithful eye. He was sure that Bolshevism spelt the ruin of Russia unless the Allies came to take her in hand. He thought that if Lloyd George had not been misinformed, he would have taken quick steps to strengthen Russia’s crumbling position.

“ I was subjected to the most villainous indignities at

the front," he said. "The Soldiers' Councils were the most chaos-breeding and autocratic institutions ever invented. They existed only to mar one's work. When I gave an order it had to be confirmed by the Soldiers' Council. Did you ever hear of carrying on war under such conditions? Whenever I gave the order to advance or attack, the soldiers ran away to hold their council, in order to decide whether they agreed to advance or no. We officers had a time of hell on earth. The soldiers looked on us with contempt and suspicion, treating us as counter-revolutionaries. They looked on all authority, save their own, as opposed to liberty and democracy. The only order they did not hold a voting council about was the command to retreat. They fled like sheep. I was so fed up with the whole story, that I came home to give my nerves a rest."

The Anarchists worked in harmony with the Communists for a while, but soon began to protest vigorously against the bloodthirsty methods of the latter, and to charge them with hidden motives quite foreign to their megaphonic declarations of love for the masses. The Anarchists' newspaper came out with large headlines protesting against the ghastly "blood baths" into which the Soviet was daily plunging Russia. Lev Chorny, the leader of the Anarchist Party, held lectures at the Officers' Economic Society, a sort of Harrod's Stores. One night, in May 1918, the Communists appeared before the houses occupied by the Anarchists in Moscow and the big towns and suppressed them with machine-guns and cannon!

Some ardent Bolshevists were touchingly conscientious in applying their principles. I know of a young French governess who was on her way home at night when she was stopped by a practical Bolshevist. "How much have you in your purse?" he asked her, as he pointed a revolver between her eyes.

"Fifty roubles," she answered him in horror.

"Our Bolshevik programme gives all power to the proletariat," he said. "Hand over your money. You are a servant of the bourgeoisie."

She delivered up her purse, saying: "But I earn my own living. We should share all alike."

"True," he said, "here's half of your fifty roubles."

Handing her twenty-five roubles, he went his way. A little farther on she was stopped again by an ardent Bolshevik.

"Give me your money," he ordered.

She gave him her purse. He counted the money and gave her twelve roubles fifty copecks back, taking the small change from his pocket. "If anyone else stops you, say to him 'Vania has taken.'"

Before getting to her home she was stopped again.

"Vania has taken," she repeated to the man.

"That's all right," he said, "give me half of your money."

She gave him six roubles twenty-five copecks. Luckily she arrived home without being molested again, otherwise she would have come back penniless. She declared they would have had her life, if she had had nothing else to give. So terrified was the population at the horrible operations of the too practical Bolsheviks, that many refused to stir out of doors.

When the Bolshevik commissaries and officials had grown rich on the spoliations of the bourgeoisie, their unofficial brethren began their profitable practice on them. To hold up a Bolshevik commissary was sure to yield a goodly fortune. The bourgeoisie had nothing more to lose. Realising the danger to themselves and their class, Lenin and Trotzky issued proclamations and orders to the criminals to quit the town within twenty-four hours, under pain of being shot on the spot if caught. How many obeyed is not known, but still the murders and raids went on and a great deal of disorderly shooting went on in the streets,

usually resulting in the death of innocent pedestrians. The right to possess fire-arms was confined to Bolsheviks. They made plentiful use of them day and night to the terror of town and country.

CHAPTER XVIII

RED DAYS

Moscow after the enthronement of Bolshevism became a living terror to the ordinary citizen. Crime reached such tremendous proportions that it became dangerous to be out after dusk. Murders, raids, robberies and assaults, became the order of the day. It was the immediate result of the Bolshevik methods. In their efforts to ruin the Provisional Government, and to demoralise the people, in preparation for their coup, they had preached far and wide the slogan: "Steal the stolen!" (*Grab Nagrablennoe!*), which appeared to them as the best way of getting the people to abolish capitalism and private property.

These deliberate incitements to robbery were accompanied by furious demands for the blood of the bourgeoisie. "Death to the Bourgeoisie!" was written on many a red banner paraded by the Bolsheviks, with a great show of guns through the streets. All the cut-throat rabble of the country flocked to assist the Bolshevik leaders, attracted, no doubt, by the lurid picture of gain.

It cannot be doubted that most of Russia's sufferings have been due to this demoniacal campaign of incitement to robbery and murder. How any Government, whose slogan was "Steal the stolen!" could expect to carry on a successful national economy surpassed one's understanding. Its only result could be the setting up of a ferocious tyranny to quell the evil powers it had incited in its effort to get power, and ruin the form of society it hated. There was much

comfortable talk among the Bolsheviks of sweeping all away and building up afresh. To those who were doomed to witness the sweeping away, it was like a hideous nightmare.

In those early days of Red fury and madness, I went to live in the house of a Moscow millionaire, who was anxious to have a few foreigners fill up his spacious dwelling. With consular certificates on the doors he trusted his property would be safe from the general confiscation which the Bolshevik Government was carrying out.

The first day I spent in the house was enlivened by a daring attempt at blackmail. We were having dinner, when a ring came from the front door. The footman went at once to see who was there, coming back with a letter for M. Merloff, the millionaire. A boy was waiting for an answer. Tearing open the envelope, M. Merloff read the following note :

“ You are requested to hand one hundred thousand roubles to the boy who brings this note. He will return in ten minutes' time, if the sum is not available at once. After that delay, if the money is not delivered, we will consider ourselves free to act.

“ THE SOLDIERS' TERROR.”

Skull and crossbones were drawn on the top of the paper.

The state of emotion into which my host fell on reading this note completely deprived him of his thinking powers. His wife and servants set up a most distressing yell of fear and terror. They were sure they would all be murdered. All the horrible details of the numerous murders and robberies of the past few weeks came back to their minds, and supplied them with matter for a babble of agitated talk. They had already had several bands of Bolshevik marauders in the house. They had hoped my consular document would have kept them safe from all danger.



THE WIFE OF THE "RED MERLOFF," A LEADER
OF MOSCOW SOCIETY UNDER BOTH RÉGIMES.

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The millionaire, who was a flabby, over-indulged young man of thirty-three, lay prone before the ikons, in a state of *aboulia*. After a while, he recovered, and started to cross himself feverishly about a hundred times in succession, murmuring "*Gospodi pomilui!*" with his hot, red lips. Upstairs, the manservant was hunting up the necessary sum to stave off the threatened massacre.

As we were living in a house on the Leontovski just behind the Governor's house, where I had spent a short imprisonment during the Revolution, I thought it would be wise to go and renew my acquaintance with the commissars. I knew that the Bolshevists' leaders were anxious, above all, for power, and that, however much they had preached murder and robbery before getting it, they must soon set about putting their own house in order.

I found the commissar quite willing to help. In fact, he said Lenin was issuing an order to all bandits to clear out of Moscow within twenty-four hours, and that many bourgeois had come forward to help in the restoration of civil order. He gave me three young Red Guards to take home and hide in the house. They would be able to deal with any bandits who called for money or murder.

Accordingly, the three Red Guards were smuggled into the house through the yard gate which opened on to a street at the back. Hidden in the hall, they waited for the return of the messenger. He did not come back. For five days the family lived in terror and dread of assassination. The Red Guards remained in the house. One evening the door-bell was rung. The boy was there again. A Red Guard seized and dragged him inside. He burst into a torrent of tears and declared that he knew nothing about the contents of the letter. It had been given to him by a man who was waiting at the corner of the street and had promised him a reward.

He was ordered to return to the man, while the Red Guards would follow him at a little distance. The boy did

this, and arriving at the corner of the crowded Tverskoy Street pointed to a man and dashed away into hiding. The arrested man turned out to be a quite mild-mannered Jewish-tailor who lived in the house opposite the millionaire's. He protested that he was a fervent admirer of Bolshevism and had nothing to do with the Soldiers' Terror. A search at his house, however, revealed a cunning organisation for the terrorisation of well-to-do citizens. The tailor did nothing but devise the plots, getting the more desperate elements of the town to risk their skins. He was condemned to be shot, but pride of race came to his rescue, and he was given a post as commissar to do the work of relieving bourgeois citizens of their wealth.

Meanwhile, from intimate association with the Red Guards who had lain in wait for the bandits, M. Merloff had learnt a lesson. He was a typical Moscow millionaire. At eighteen he had inherited a fortune of thirty million roubles, his father having been a member of a well-known cotton-spinning family. He had spent money so recklessly that he was put under a tutelage till the age of thirty-five. He used to give dinner parties and placed a diamond and emerald ring on the plate of each guest as a memento.

Several times before the Revolution when I dined at his house, he had a brass band in the dining-room that played such terrific music as to make one put one's hands to one's ears. During the silence of the band he would entertain his guests with the most expensive singers, violinists and reciters. His greatest delight was to have the dining-table cleared after dinner and invite his thirty or forty guests to witness a ballerina pirouette and caper on the polished boards. Sometimes he would order the swiftest, smartest *likhach* (crack drivers) and invite all his guests to drive with him to an orgy-villa in the mysterious region beyond the Petrovsky Park, on the outskirts of the town. On the occasion I went with the rest of the guests, M. Merloff ordered the brass band to enter the first carriages and precede the procession of

flying revellers, blowing their "damnedest" on their instruments as he commanded.

"Let Moscow know that Sasha Merloff is passing!" he cried, springing into his seat and ordering the coachman to whip up the horses.

He never appeared in the street without a pair of white gloves and a huge golden tie-pin in the shape of the crown of Austria. It had been given by the Emperor Franz Josef to M. Philipoff, the famous pieman, for supplying pies to the Austrian Court. M. Merloff captured the wife of the millionaire pieman and paraded the Imperial Crown as a token of conquest. They lived together without wedlock, the lady not being able to induce her husband to divorce her. That, of course, was not important, for free love and illegal households were the order of the day in Russia long before the Revolution. It was marriage which was considered disreputable by many, being a relic of superstition. The Bolsheviks merely gave a legal standing to what was common practice and common opinion.

M. Merloff had a hansom cab. He wanted to shine before the astonished eyes of Moscow as the possessor of all that was best and smartest, "all that was English," as he so often expressed himself. He would dash through Moscow in his hansom cab at all hours of the day and night. In the day time he would be seen beaming from the interior. At night he had a large bell tied underneath, the clanging of which reminded the citizens of the night-veiled town that "Sasha Merloff was passing" in "all that was English." The curious thing about the cab was that he had managed to have it sent over from London during the war. Hospitals were crying out for English instruments and Red Cross material, but could not get them because of the lack of transport. M. Merloff's millions got everything he wanted.

He had a great thirst for good wine. During the war he was able to get as much as he wanted. When the Bolsheviks got into power, the supply was cut off, because he no

longer had friends in the wine-control department. He suffered in patience till the Red Guards came into the house. He decided to do what so many people were doing. He would get a lorry, form a gang, and go round and confiscate whatever he wanted. With real Red Guards in the lorry who could resist him ?

The lorry was soon procured and the Red Guards accepted his leadership. He told them he knew of a good house for wine and valuables. They could have the valuables if he could have the wine.

He mounted the lorry, nailed a red flag to a pole and set off with a cheer in the company of the armed Red Guards.

In a large house on the other side of Moscow lived a millionaire. He also was of the cotton-spinning millionaires, another M. Merloff in fact. The Red M. Merloff had a grudge against him. Besides being his nephew, he was his ward. Till he reached the age of thirty-five, two years hence, he had to depend on this man for his allowances. He had chafed the bridle too long. He would show the old man what he could do.

"The Red Merloff !" he laughed, as he dashed off in the lorry.

An hour later he returned to the house with a load of wine. He spent the evening drinking with his new young friends the Red Guards, laughing and jesting at the look of terror that had come over his old uncle's face when the Red Guards entered his house with their rifles cocked, and at his futile rage when his ward and nephew led them about the house, pillaging his plate and wine cellars, and acclaiming himself to all as "The Red Merloff."

Soon after this raid, his house became a haunt of wild characters, who passed the night devouring the things they confiscated during the day. They found revolutionary Bolshevism an exciting business and enjoyed it to their hearts' content. I doubt whether any of them understood Lenin's theories, although they appreciated his methods. They were, however, the material he was obliged to use for his domination.

CHAPTER XIX

ADVENTURES IN SEARCH OF FLOUR

As the peasants refused to bring any produce to Moscow, owing to the policy of the Soviet Government, it became necessary for everybody who was not privileged to enjoy the princely rank of commissary or membership of the Communist Party to forage for food on his own account.

Of the restricted quantities of flour and potatoes that were brought into Moscow by train from the remoter parts of Russia, the first share was naturally divided among the members of the Communist high caste. Provided these were nourished and clothed, especially the Lettish bodyguard to the Soviet leaders, the rest of the community had to scramble for itself.

Bands of workmen and timid bourgeois boarded the outgoing trains with empty sacks under their arms. No one seemed to care where the train went to, so long as there was a chance of getting away to the country for flour.

In the family with whom I was staying, things had come to a sad pass. Babushka, the millionaire grandmother, whose sole delight in her long widowhood had been to look after her twenty grandchildren, was at her wits' end. Even her hidden store of Tsarist roubles was of no avail to obtain food.

Babushka came into my room one morning and held out her left hand in appeal. She was sixty-six years of age and walked about with a stick for support, although her gaiety of heart never failed her.

"*Yury Yurich!*" she called me, for so I had been dubbed

by my Russian friends. " Won't you help me? Go up to the Sookharevsky Square. They say one can buy flour up there, if one pays well. You will go, won't you? You are a British subject. They won't shoot you! "

Of course, I felt proud of being a British subject, and sorry for the poor Russians whose privilege seemed to consist in a liability to be shot, whenever their overlords disapproved of them.

Babushka, however, rather thought I carried my nationality written on my face, for she imagined I would be safe even in the spasmodic shooting which went on in the markets. She did not wish any of her grandchildren to run the risk.

There were over thirty hungry mouths in the house, so I took the pile of bank notes she held out. Clad in an old coat, I threw a sack over my shoulder and set out for the square.

A motley crowd of moujhiks, workmen, and nondescripts were haggling round dirty sacks that littered the filthy cobbles. A rank smell of leather and sheepskins filled the air.

A thick-lipped, loud-voiced peasant was arguing with some workmen about the price of some flour. I overheard that they could only pay in Kerensky notes. As I had a bundle of Tsarist notes I waited until the workmen moved away in disgust to another trader. I had to be very cautious, as there were Red Guards about who might at any moment take it into their heads to fire their rifles or confiscate the provisions. Moreover, there was the difficulty of getting the sack of flour home. To be safe against robbery or confiscation, I thought it would be better to engage a peasant cart. This I managed to get without difficulty by showing the young peasant owner a good Tsarist note.

It required but a few minutes' talk to buy the sack of flour. I got the trader to help me put it into the cart and then I sat down on top of it.

Just as I was about to drive off in triumph, a couple of

Lettish Red Guards came up and demanded to know what was in the cart. Being told that it was flour, they declared it confiscated and ordered the driver to take it to their quarters hard by. An altercation ensued between the driver, the trader, and the Red Guards, who soon found themselves in the midst of a turbulent sea of musty-smelling humanity.

While the attention of the Red Guards was thus being taken up, an excellent opportunity offered itself to the hungry crowd to attempt a raid on the flour sacks and potato heaps. In a few seconds the whole of the square was in a state of pandemonium. Long-haired moujhiks struggled with wild-eyed workmen, and terrified traders fought tooth and nail to keep their goods.

The Red Guards turned from my cart to restore order, firing their guns. At the first sound of shots a general stampede took place. Horses and carts bolted in all directions, knocking people down and adding to the confusion.

My driver had his wits about him. He whipped up his horse and dashed out of the square, carrying me and the precious sack of flour into safety.

That night Babushka's grandchildren tasted white bread for the first time in three months.

When things got bad again, it was impossible to obtain any meal in Moscow or in the surrounding villages. People had to take long train journeys into the remoter districts.

Every Saturday I went with a young student, one of my kind old landlady's grandchildren, to get rye flour. It was almost useless to take even Tsarist notes with one. The peasants had so many, and could buy nothing with them, that they preferred to barter their corn for manufactured articles. Gold watches and material for dresses were particularly valuable.

Babushka had already got rid of her own gold jewellery in this way, and had been obliged to take down the plush curtains in the drawing-room and sort out the gaudiest coloured petticoats and skirts in her wardrobe.

One Saturday, Gennady, the student, and I had gone to a district about thirty miles outside of Moscow in search of flour and meat. Although we tramped more than twenty versts and called at every *izba*, we were unable to induce any peasant to sell us even a potato. Word had flown round the countryside that the Red Guards and the Bolshevik agents were confiscating private property, even the peasant's corn. Requisitioning by arbitrary Bolsheviks had taken place all over the country. The peasants were given worthless rouble notes in payment.

The great outcry among the peasants was against the artfulness of the Soviet Government in giving them the land and confiscating the fruit of it and their labours. The sense of treachery and deception made the peasant hostile to everyone who came in search of produce.

When we returned home with empty sacks, the disappointment in the huge family was immense. The little children were ravenously hungry and looked poor little angels with their wings cut off when they were told there was nothing to eat. Looking from the window of the drawing-room they disconsolately watched the luxurious motor-cars flitting by, full of Bolshevik officials, men and women, to whom the trouble of bread-foraging and starving was spared on account of their position as the founders and keepers of the Workers' Paradise.

Unable to bear the sight of so many little ones clamouring for food Gennady and I decided to go to the country once more. Some workmen who had been given rooms on the ground floor told us to go to the Government of Tamboff, where the crop had been a good one. They had been there themselves and found plenty of flour and peasants willing to sell.

Next morning we rose very early, strapped our sacks on our backs and caught a train for Tamboff. We had a pair of rose-pink, pleated silk petticoats in our sacks (part of Babushka's wedding attire), a couple of pairs of top-boots

and a few glittering rings with glass diamonds and an old-fashioned gold watch.

The train was chock full of "Sackmen," all going on the same desperate mission. If the fate of a Government or system depended on the comments of the people it rules, the Soviet regime would have been banished to the Chamber of Horrors without any doubt. But the Russian worker seems to use most of his energy in talking about the things he would like and waiting for them to come by miracle. He seems to be especially cut out by nature to put up with tyranny. He was well-schooled in submissiveness by the Tartars for over two hundred years, tasted the strength of autocracy for two hundred years and looks like adapting himself to some sort of Communist despotism for the next two centuries.

I felt sure the great-grandchildren of the men I met on the train would still be lamenting their hardships and railing against their masters in the same voluble, endless manner.

In the third-class carriage we travelled in were two men, who got into conversation with us. They were decently dressed, and appeared to belong to the better class of workmen. They seemed to have read and discussed matters in a more enlightened atmosphere.

They both had sacks, and joined in the general conversation among the poor, starved travellers about the merciless tyranny and worthlessness of the Soviet Government. Soon they began to talk of the best place to obtain flour. They pointed to the crowds of people endeavouring to board the train at the stopping places. Even they were country folk going in search of food. From the windows of the train the countryside appeared to be a barren waste of good soil, although it was harvesting time.

Our two men told us they were going to a village about thirty miles beyond Tamboff. They had relations among the peasants there, and could get as much flour as they needed. Would we care to join them?

It did not take us long to make up our minds to do so. We became quite friendly, and they helped us smoke our cigarettes.

In the afternoon the train stopped at a lonely wayside station. Our men told us they had to alight there, and tramp across country. Of course, we yielded to the temptation to go with them. Our prospect of getting flour seemed brighter than ever.

We trudged along the cross country route for over an hour, calling at an *izba* by the way, to ask for the mercy of a cup of water. This was given to us willingly by the wrinkled old widow, who looked out of the tiny window in answer to our calls.

"Where do you come from? Moscow, the golden-domed?" she asked.

"From Red Moscow," one of our companions answered, laughing. "They have killed the Little Father. Soon they will kill us all. The Red Guards and Chinese are marching against the log cabins."

The little wrinkled old woman crossed herself, sighing "Lord have mercy." When she came back with a jug of water, she was sad and wistful.

"Why did they kill the Little Father?" she asked. "Is it Anti-christ has come? He will rule in the place of the Little Father before the trumpets sound, and the Saviour shall ride on a fiery horse, and the dead shall rise again. Father Seraphim told me. He is a 'chosen of God,' and heard my confession in Jerusalem."

Then the poor old woman started to tell us a rambling account of her tramp to Jerusalem, where she had caught a light from the holy fire, which came down from heaven on Good Friday, at the Tomb of the Lord.

We went into her neat little log cabin, and saw the flame still burning before the ikon of the Saviour. There was an extraordinary light of simple joy in her pale-grey eyes, as she boasted to us, that she had kept the flame alight after

bringing it home from Jerusalem, walking all the way, except for the sea passage, to Odessa.

Soon after leaving the pious widow's hut we met a peasant, who gave us a lift in his cart. As we jolted over the uneven tracks, our companions sang lusty songs, startling the crows from the fields, and filling the forests with echoes. It was pleasant to forget all about Sovietism and economic troubles, in the midst of the vast open country, or in the depths of the silent forests. Our companions helped us to slip the load of worry.

The peasant reached his destination and put us down. Our companions guided us onwards to some unseen goal across the endless country. As dusk began to fall, it was suggested we should stop at the next village and forage for something to eat.

At a couple of struggling *izbas* on the fringe of a village, we made a halt. Gennady went into one of the huts to see whether he might be able to tempt the owner with some glittering glass diamonds, and procure some rye bread and, perhaps, a little cooked meat.

To my surprise he came out a few moments later and declared he had struck a bit of good luck. The peasant had been so captivated by the diamond rings, that he had offered to supply as much wheat and rye flour as we could bargain for. The peasant's wife was given a glimpse of the pleated, pink silk petticoat, and fell into dreams of ecstasy.

Within ten minutes the bargain was concluded. Our sacks were filled with good flour, and a promise given that a similar quantity would be given whenever we returned with similar articles.

It was useless to accompany our train acquaintances any longer. They looked admiringly at our bulging sacks, calculating the enormous profits it would bring, if it was sold in Moscow.

It had grown rather dark and there seemed no chance of

our getting back to the railway station, some twenty versts away. Our companions, also, did not feel disposed to continue their trudge in the dark. The night began to get chilly and damp. Our companions showed a great bent for sociability, and proposed we should spend the evening in a little sing-song, after which we could sleep in the granary at the end of the village.

Our peasant host was in a very amiable mood, donning the old-fashioned gold watch with a majestic air. His sallow-faced, toothless wife, lost no time in putting on the pleated, rose silk petticoat, and calling in her neighbours to inspect it. Her satisfaction faded rather suddenly, when a fat, scornful-looking neighbour declared that the Red Guards would troop into the village to confiscate it, as soon as they heard of its glories. If that happened, she was sure the whole village would be sacked, and no woman would have anything decent to put on.

This dismal picture cast a gloomy shadow over the assembly, but it was not long before the merry spirit regained its power. On the scrubby patch of tough green grass outside the *izba*, the pink-petticoated peasant danced a graceful round with a young man to the accompaniment of a balalaika.

Later on, we went to lie down on some clean straw and hay in the great barn at the end of the row of *izbas*. Rats were abundant, but we did not mind them. We were tired out. For a good while we talked about the pleasure we would bring to the household when they saw our bulging sacks. We had enough to last a fortnight.

Our companions had thrown themselves down on the hay, and had dropped off to sleep at once. They had shown no inclination to chatter, although it had been impossible to get them to call a halt during the day. Pretty soon we heard their gristly snores mingling with the hoots of some owls among the rafters.

I went to sleep dreaming of the happy faces of the children

at home, and the smile on old Babushka's kind wrinkled face, when she would catch sight of the heavy sacks on our backs. I lay with my tired head pillowed on my precious flour.

It was about half an hour later that I woke up. A sudden fall of the temperature seemed to have occurred. I felt cold and was shuddering. The owls were hooting dismally in the upper darkness. Through the cracks of the walls a few thin shafts of silver moonlight gleamed and danced, splashing the wheels of a cart with a shimmering glow.

I cast a glance at Gennady, he was sleeping soundly, his head resting on his arm. Turning to the spot where our fellows travellers lay, I was surprised to discover they had gone. I felt the bag at my head to make sure that it was safe. The flour was there without doubt. I concluded the men must have changed their minds, and slipped off to continue their tramp.

Nestling down, I prepared to fall asleep once more. Thoughts, however, crowded into my mind and kept me awake. I counted the number of hoots of the owls, and the rats that scuttled across the moonbeam on the floor. Suddenly, there came the sound of cartwheels and the pat of a horse's hooves. I thought it must be a peasant arriving home from Tamboff.

The sound of the wheels stopped and voices approached. They were faint and low. The door of the barn was pushed gently open, and a couple of dark figures slipped across the bright moonbeam. Scenting danger, I dragged Gennady's arm, and sprang to my feet. Too late! Before Gennady could recover his senses, one of the men threw a piece of sacking over his head, and stretched him out helpless on the ground. With a piece of rope he bound his arms behind his back, forcing his knee into his chest to prevent his struggles.

At the same time the other man dashed at me. I was on my feet and thus escaped being stifled with the sacking. I caught up a flail that was lying close at hand, and made a

terrific sweep with it at my aggressors. Unfortunately, I had never handled a flail before, and one of the throngs swung round and struck me a hard blow over the eyes. I was dazed for some moments and staggered forward. Another blow struck the back of my head, and I fell senseless to the ground.

When I recovered my senses some time later, a smell of burning stung my nostrils, and a cloud of smoke blinded my eyes. The place was on fire. I heard Gennady's stifled groans and staggered towards him. He was lying face-downwards on the floor, his head bound tight with the sack and his arms trussed behind his back.

Too stunned myself to carry him, I dragged him by the heels to the door. It was barred on the outside. The material and workmanship, however, were so primitive that the boards yielded easily to my kick. I scrambled through the hole and unbarred the door. Outside in the cool night air, I unfastened the rope and sack that bound Gennady.

When we looked at each other, we burst into a grim fit of laughter. Neither of us had any coats, and our shirts were torn. We had been robbed, shamefully robbed, and ill-treated. Even our railway tickets were taken together with our coats.

Gennady rushed back into the smoking barn to recover the sacks of flour. He came back looking as dismal as Jeremiah, and quite as eloquent.

"What to do? What to do?" he kept asking, waving his hands and shrugging his shoulders.

"Put out the fire," I replied. "The brutes must have intended burning the whole show down on top of us."

We went and woke up the peasant who had sold us the flour. He came quickly out and showed us where to get water and buckets. The village well was fortunately close by.

The fire was nothing more than a mound of smouldering wet straw. A few bucketfuls of water sufficed to put it

out. I wondered whether the thieves had lit a cigarette, and thrown down the match in the excitement of their triumph, or whether they had intentionally cast a flame on to the straw in order to burn the place down. I gave them the credit of the doubt, till the peasant found the door of his stable open, and a horse and cart gone. We came to the conclusion that the men considered a fire in the village would make them safe from pursuit.

After complications with the irate peasant, whom we finally soothed, with a promise to bring him some good clothing on our next visit for flour, we set out for the station. We tramped a good way, and took shelter at last in a way-side forge, where we blew the huge bellows and stirred up the embers. There was a hayrick not far off, so we brought in a few armfuls of hay and spread it on the floor for a bed. There we rested till the morning, slipping away before the smith was astir.

At the station we could find no one to lend us money for a ticket. In despair we decided to walk back to the nearest village and ask the priest to assist us. We met with a kindly reception, were given a couple of old coats and sufficient money to cover our fare. The priest himself was in hard straits, because the local Bolsheviks had tampered with his right to a certain plot of land. Nevertheless, he recognised we were genuinely in need and reliable.

When we boarded the train we found it packed with "sackmen" returning with their spoils. We related to some workmen how we had been robbed. They expressed no surprise. It was a common thing, they explained, for clever fellows to offer to guide people to desirable spots and to rob them on the way, usually in the forests.

Most of the passengers wore happy smiles. They were glad to be able to go back to their anxious families with food. The cry of most of them was "Give us back private trade! The Soviet Government is making us starve!"

The excitement grew more and more as the train drew near Moscow. Just before the industrial town of Serpukhovo, the train was met at the station by a body of Red Guards from the local Soviet.

With rifles in their hands, they ordered the people to bring out their sacks. The pandemonium of yells and protests that ensued can hardly be described. Confiscation! The whole train became a hive of infuriated men and women.

Some Bolshevik workmen on the train pointed out that Lenin had issued an order permitting the workers to go in search of food. To this the Red Guards replied they didn't care a fig what Lenin said. Their Local Soviet had given the order. Tempers rose and words became threatening. The challenge became so hot that a few fiery workmen, who as Communists were allowed to carry revolvers, drew them and threatened to defend their sacks of food with force.

A few minutes later there came the report of a shot, and almost before one could realise what was happening, a veritable battle of shots had taken place. In the end a Local Red Guard was wounded and three workmen on the train killed.

The corpses were thrown back into the train and the wailing load of horrified, dejected and humiliated humanity continued its journey to Moscow. Only a few had succeeded in keeping their sacks. All the rest was confiscated for the use of the "Comrades of the Local Soviets."

A huge crowd of mothers and children awaited the train at the station in Moscow. Expectation gleamed in every eye. Food! Food! It had come at last!

When the travellers alighted with empty hands a groan of despair rose from many a throat, and children burst into tears, tugging at their mother's skirts.

Some well-fed Communist wit called out, "Here comes the provisions!" The crowd turned to a group of men who were carrying some long objects out of a compartment.

A shudder ran through the nerve-racked crowd. A woman stepped forward and lifted the cover.

"Seriojha!" she exclaimed, turning deathly white, and throwing herself on the body. Her little girl broke into piercing cries.

Gennady and I hurried away, and boarded a tram. Walking across the Scobolyev Square we were held up by a band of Red Guards and armed workmen. The balcony of the former Governor's house was decorated with red flags and a man was addressing the crowd. We recognised Trotsky. With wild, breast-heaving enthusiasm he told how the World Revolution had already begun in France and Britain. There had been a rising in Lyons. The blood of the French workers was reddening the streets, they had struck the first blow against bourgeois tyranny.

As we slipped away, we heard the Lettish soldiers raise a roar of cheers.

We felt sick to death of all the humbug of Communism, its red flags, lying promises and bloodthirsty raving. We knew Babushka and the children were expecting us to return with well-filled sacks. The roaring cheers of the well-fed Communist Red Guards echoed in our ears like the mocking laughter of a crowd of demons.

There was a pale, sad face watching from the window overlooking the street as we approached Babushka's house. Catching sight of us, she clapped her hands and a band of eager children scrambled round her to catch the first glimpse of their "sackmen."

"Where's the flour?" was the question we heard on all sides, as we entered the house.

"A visitation of God!" old Babushka repeated, shuffling about the room with the aid of her stick. Our story seemed to take the power from her limbs. The children stood around like images of silent sadness. Babushka ordered the maid to bring in the samovar and make tea. Seated round the long dining-table, everyone listened to Gennady's

account of our expedition. He was so excited and eloquent that his listeners forgot their hunger and worries for a while.

At one point, the story was interrupted by the maid. She rushed into the room in a fever of excitement and announced the joyful news that some peasants were selling potatoes outside one of the gates of Moscow. Her brother had just come from the place. Without hesitation, we took our sacks and some old clothing and rushed off to barter them for as much as we could get.

Fortunately, dusk was falling. We secured two sacks of good potatoes and shouldered them, loitering among the motley, evil-smelling, cursing crowd until we found a chance to slip past the Red Guards.

That night Babushka's eyes beamed with delight. The children's faces were bright and happy. Opening the piano, Babushka played some Nocturnes of Chopin with exquisite feeling. She had not touched the keys of a piano for over ten years. Then, with tears of joy glistening in her aged eyes, she softly sang: "*Connais-tu le pays.*"

"I am nearing seventy," she said to me, smiling through her tears. "But I am not too old to feel the depth of a passing joy at times."

CHAPTER XX

THE HOUSE IN THE WOODS

I

THREE men were talking in a dark room at the back of a large house in Moscow, just after the Revolution. It was a man's room, as the rifles, swords, pistols and weapons on the plain walls showed. A couple of Belgian guns lay on the bare oak table.

The tall young man at the window, who had joined in the conversation only with an occasional remark of discouragement, suddenly pulled his hands out of his pockets and turned to his companions with an exclamation of triumph.

"There's the first flake!" he said. "There'll be a good downfall before the night is out."

The two men addressed sprang up and went to see the welcome snow just beginning to fall. Here and there through the outer darkness, dimly lit by a few straggling rays of light from the windows of the surrounding houses, a twirling white speck made its way to the earth.

"That settles it!" said Serge Volkoff, the tall young man who had stood by the window. "We're sure to get permission to go down to Holshtcheviki to-morrow. They won't be able to put us off this time."

The rather sullen look that crossed his features showed that he was determined to have his way at all costs. He was a handsome young Russian, a student of the Petrograd Law School and accustomed to treat the world from an autocratic point of view. His inclinations, however, had been given a chafing curb by the change of Government. Nevertheless,

he had the parts of a decent sportsman in him and was anxious to get a little rough shooting before the end of the season.

Vladimir Talin, the man with the fair hair who kept fondling one of the guns on the table, had suggested an expedition to the country many weeks before. He had never passed an Autumn without taking powder and pouch and setting off with a couple of friends, a pair of dogs, and an old keeper across the fields and through the vast forests that he owned about fifty miles outside of Moscow. Now, however, social conditions had changed and for the first time he found himself deprived of his pleasure. He longed to get out into the healthy space of the country and return to the house in the woods with a good bag of hares, foxes, grouse and wild game.

The house in the woods was his. He had built it of rough logs to serve as a shelter for him and his friends when he went rough-shooting. Many a night had he spent there before a fire of flaming logs after a day's pleasure with the gun.

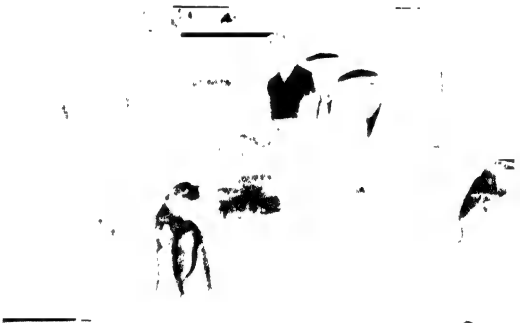
When he had tried to go there this time, he was told it would be dangerous. The country was still in a state of upheaval. Certain people with misplaced power and zeal might resent any re-appearance of the former owners of the forests.

He had tried to get a permit from acquaintances in high places, but had failed to extract anything beyond a promise that the matter would be favourably dealt with at the first fall of snow, which might have meant the next blue moon.

Now, after tiresome waiting the heavens were merciful at last. The three men had met that evening because there had been a prospect of snow. They had talked the matter over in darkness, fearing to light the lamp because it would show to outsiders the weapons on the wall—they were liable to be confiscated—and because they wanted to see what tricks the heavens were going to play.



THE HOUSE IN THE WOODS.



THE AUTHOR, WITH COMMISSAR AND FRIENDS,
SHOOTING IN THE FOREST.



IN THE FOREST.

The third man was myself. I had dropped in casually for a chat.

I realised that the only way to come to any definite action was to stop the talking. My Russian friends were fine fellows, but they took a long time to get into action. Their many-syllabled language and their inborn dislike of exertion were chiefly to blame.

"To-morrow will be Saturday," I said. "The best way of getting down to the country before Sunday would be to go round this evening to our friend at Headquarters and remind him of his promise. The first thing to ask for is a permit to carry arms."

This was agreed to. Volkoff suggested we should go without it, hire a peasant to take us down in his cart and then plunge straight away into the forest. This we disapproved of. The sound of shooting would only lead to complications. There were plenty of people who were only too anxious to pick a quarrel.

Just as we decided to go round to Headquarters in a body, the door shook beneath the hard thumps of a heavy hand and a gruff voice asked for admittance.

One of us turned the key and let in the visitor. He was in no way unwelcome.

The snowflakes glistened on his fur peak cap and melted on his leather jacket as he entered the warm room. There was a merry twinkle in his eyes, that were deep-set in his rosy, cold-whipped, youngster's face.

He was a tall, huge-built, tough specimen of young Russia.

"Come in, Commissar!" we all shouted at once, glad at his timely arrival.

He smiled heartily at the touch of irony in our voices as we pronounced the word "Commissar."

He was a student of the lower life, a fellow with a breadth of spirit that would have swept the seas. He used to sing and dance, tell yarns, drink vodka, learn whole text-books off by heart, prepare for his exams. and earn his keep at a

student's hostel. When the change of Government came, he found no difficulty in getting an appointment as Commissar for Art. He knew very little about Art, but the job invested him with all the authority he required, and, needless to say, he made use of it for the benefit of his friends. It was he whom we had approached for a little influence regarding our desire for a gun-licence.

"Why don't you turn on the light?" he asked, the light from the passage encircling him with a golden glow.

Volkoff struck a match while I drew the curtains across the window.

Boris, the commissar, stepped heavily forward and threw off his leather jacket.

Round his body stretched a wide belt fitted with a double row of cartridges.

A yell of delight broke from our lips. We had been looking forward to finding ammunition in the house in the woods, but somehow, without daring to reveal our thoughts, we had suspected the house would have been looted during its owner's absence. Now, however, we were at rest on the score of shot.

Boris watched our delight with beaming eyes. When we taxed him about getting the permit for us, he burst into roars of laughter.

"They wouldn't hear of it!" he said, cooling down at the sight of our chop-fallen faces. "In fact, they took it as a joke. It certainly struck them as humorous to have a man begging to be allowed to shoot over his own estates. But they thought it would be in your own interests to keep you from getting into entanglements with the peasants, whose temper is violent and hostile at present."

"So we've got to give up the idea of going to the country?" I asked, voicing the thoughts of the others.

Boris stood and watched our disappointed faces for a while. There was something uncanny about the way he seemed to gloat over our disillusionment.

"There's not the slightest chance of your getting a gun permit," he said at last. "But I'm going to give you a treat. I'm going to take you down there myself. As a commissar I have the right to carry arms. Of course, I shall go down in my official capacity as Commissar for Art, inspect a country house or two, and give the trip an over-awing look of authority red-hot from Moscow. The local fellow will be only too glad to make a good impression on a man from Headquarters."

We were infinitely pleased. All our difficulties seemed to have been whisked away by one stroke of the magic wand of "authority."

It was eight o'clock. A few seconds after the last stroke of the clock, the door opened and Talin's man brought in the samovar and placed it, hissing and steaming, on the table.

Full of hopes and eager expectations we sat down to a typical Russian bachelor's meal. There was dried sturgeon, caviare, anchovy, pickled gherkins and mushrooms and steaming plates of borshtch. In spite of the food scarcity, our host was able to do us well.

Before the meal was over, we decided to set out for the country that very night. The proposal seemed risky, considering the chance there was of a snow blizzard blowing up. But of the four of us, three were Russians and their resolve had to be fulfilled with lightning speed lest it fizzled out and left them with a loss of appetite for activity.

II

We found there was a train leaving about ten o'clock. Accordingly, we put on our warmest coats and set out for the station. Boris had his leather jacket, the hall-mark of a commissar in the eyes of the people, and carried one of the guns with an air of lofty power. The crowding, jostling men and women at the railway-station fell back from his path like ninepins.

In spite of the snow, the number of persons desirous of travelling was so great that there was no possible chance of accommodating them all on the train. Their sacks and bags, rolled up under their arms or slung over their backs, spoke volumes of the desperate efforts of the starving townsfolk to forage for food on their own account.

Boris returned from a side-door interview with the booking-clerk and brought us a ticket made out in the name of "Comrade Boris Orloff and three comrades."

It was a real dispensation of the gods. How we should have travelled without it baffles the imagination. We secured a place among the elect, but all around we saw human forms grimly holding on to the doors and platforms of the carriages. Hundreds of people sat in the snow on the roofs of the wagons, counting themselves lucky even for that uncomfortable mercy. The showers of red sparks from the wood-heated engine looked very magical in the snowy night, but the occupants of the carriage roofs may have had no eye for such poetic effects. In any case they accepted the snow and the sparks with equal calm, beyond a medley of thundering oaths which would have made anything but an engine bolt.

A commissar in our compartment took a lively interest in our guns. Boris discreetly informed him who he was, so that we might not have the unpleasant surprise of being arrested as suspects somewhere along the line.

The commissar seemed to be duly relieved of his suspicions and inspected our guns with a friendly interest. He fully realised that a Commissar for Art had to track a Rubens or Titian to its lair with a good supply of rounds in his belt, and that the blast of a rifle was sometimes required in putting the seal of State-ownership on a masterpiece in paint.

When we told him we were going to a place in the neighbourhood of Holshtcheviki, he looked surprised.

"At this time of night, it's the same as asking for death," he said. "Only this morning we had an appeal from the peasants of that district. They are scared out of

their wits. The great forest is infested with robbers, who waylay passers-by. There are terrible tales going round. They are said to kill their victims and burn their bodies in the forest. Two men from the village were attacked and murdered the day before yesterday. The peasants are in a state of panic. They are afraid to venture abroad except in armed bands and that, owing to martial law, only leads to complications with the authorities. They want Moscow to send down a column of troops to scour the forests and countryside."

He grinned in a sceptical manner. "They may well ask!" he continued. "Moscow has all her work cut out already without listening to the endless appeals that come from all over the country."

He brushed his hands through his long hair. "The country's in a deuced state," he said. "No doubt these robbers are the criminals who were let out of the prisons and brought back from Siberia at the time of the revolution. Everybody had such wonderful dreams of brotherhood and such a flood of compassion during that time of rainbow faith and hopes. Now they are reaping the reward of their folly. If there are any of those God-forsaken cut-throats about, Heaven help you! I shouldn't like to meet any of those gentry on a night like this!"

The sudden mournful whistle of the engine, echoing dismally in the depths of the surrounding dark forest, sent a cold shudder down my spine.

We all looked pretty gloomily at one another. Then we fell to discussing our immediate plan of action.

It was almost midnight. The sky had suddenly cleared and scattered a myriad stars. The feathery white pads of snow on the outspreading branches of the fir-trees gleamed like the arms of giant ghosts in the glow of the engine's fire.

After many misgivings, we decided, chiefly out of deference to Volkoff's persistent cussedness, to get out at a station which would allow of our approaching the house in the woods

from a more frequented quarter. In any case we could make inquiries.

We got out at Novo-Jerusalem. A crowd of sheep-skinned peasants jostled about the dimly-lighted station. They soon formed little gangs and started out in various directions, the bells of their sledges jingling silver-like in the clear, cold air.

We found a few peasants who were preparing to take the forest road. There was a look of gleaming terror in their eyes as they talked loudly of the peril of the way, but they cheered up wonderfully when we suggested joining them. The sight of our guns warmed their hearts.

There were four sledges in all. Two of them were going beyond our destination, so we got into them, the other two being destined to leave us for a village in another direction.

Our new-found friends made us comfortable on some hay and whipped the horses into headlong flight. We dashed past the monastery walls that loomed up white and gaunt on the village outskirts. Over the snow-bound fields our sledges flew, the horses snorting and kicking up the powdered snow in clouds.

Soon the horizon closed in with a vast stretch of forest. As we dashed ahead under the tall overhanging branches and the stars were suddenly quenched above us, we were surrounded by a tense silence, broken only by the thud of the horses' hooves on the snow and the gliding of the sledges.

For a while none of us spoke. Our thoughts were concentrated on the outlaws, expecting every moment to hear the report of a fire-arm and to find ourselves in the midst of an ambush.

Our progress was happily uneventful. Glade after glade, clearing after clearing passed, grim darkness alternating with starlit skies and white-clad dells. Then the way suddenly became tortuous and uneven, as though an ancient earthquake had jolted things out of shape and place.

Suddenly, just as we were passing through one of the

darkest spots, we were startled with grim unpleasantness by a long, hollow, echoing "Ah-hoo!"

We clutched our rifles and listened with bated breath.

Again the blood-curdling "Ah-hoo!" rang throughout the silent, dark forest. Then a chorus of shouts set the darkness rattling with echoes.

We called to the sledges that had dashed ahead, but they did not answer and were nowhere in sight.

That was most embarrassing, for we needed, above all, to keep together. The two leading sledges containing Volkoff and Boris, with the peasants, were lost to us. Talin and I, with three peasants, were in the two last sledges.

The situation was full of ugly possibilities. We drew the horses to a standstill and listened to the wild "Ah-hoos." The whole forest seemed to be in a state of bellowing pandemonium. We fancied we heard a call for help. Had the two front sledges fallen into a trap? Were the ruthless outlaws doing their deadly work?

The hurried questions we put to one another echoed the dread that gripped our hearts. Every moment, as we peered into the cavernous darkness, we expected the hidden evil to rush out upon us.

The three peasants started answering the "Ah-hoo's," thinking by that means to let friend and foe realise that others were on the war-path.

Suddenly we heard a loud call coming from the darkness at our rear. As though the devil himself had suddenly sprung out behind, our peasants took fright, crossed themselves hurriedly, and lashed at the horses with stinging whips. The horses bolted forward as though possessed, almost pitching us out behind.

Our flight must have acted as a signal for desperate action to the newcomers in our rear. Their shouts became louder and more excited. The road took a sudden bend, and we caught sight of dark figures moving at top speed through the trees behind us.

As we darted across an open space a shot rang out, then another, followed by several further reports. A bullet splintered a tree as we flitted past it.

Realising the danger, we answered the fire, although the zig-zagging of the road and the host of intervening trees made a hit almost impossible. Nevertheless, we thought it wise to let the enemy know we were determined to hold our own.

For more than a mile the breathless chase went on. Our peasants were so terrified and lashed the horses with such fury that we soon left the enemy far behind. His shouts and shots grew fainter, and soon ceased altogether.

Nevertheless, our peasants kept up the horses' speed till we arrived at the farm-buildings attached to the house in the woods.

We hastily woke up the keeper. He was in a surly temper and had bad news for us. The house had been used occasionally by some political peasants, and he wondered whether he would be right in giving up the key to its former owner. The fear of the wrath of the new gods made him very cautious.

While we were still discussing the matter, the two sledges bearing Boris and Volkoff dashed up. Like ourselves, they were in a state of feverish excitement, and talked loudly of robber attacks and lucky escapes.

The appearance of Boris in his commissar's leather jacket produced a complete change of tone in the diffident keeper. The spirit of service suddenly breathed in his voice and animated his limbs in spite of the late hour.

Within, in ten minutes after our arrival, we were sitting in the billiard-room of the log house, warming ourselves before a blazing fire.

The sheep-skinned peasants were with us, drinking some of the vodka we were lucky enough to find undiscovered in the cellars. We merrily drank one another's health, and told our respective versions of the great adventure.

When the vodka had loosened our tongues and the excitement wore off, we gradually realised that a mistake must have been made.

At the end, we concluded we had been firing at one another. The leading sledges must have taken a wrong track, which separated them from the other two, only to turn up at their rear later on. The fright of the peasants accounted for a lot, Volkoff's cussedness for much more.

III

We rose early next morning and roamed the forest, shooting a good deal of game. Vassili, an old keeper, came with us, although he harped continually on the robber danger. We found no trace of any outlaws and jestily came to the conclusion they were a myth of the peasant mind.

After a good day's shooting, we returned to the log house. The sullen watchman told us that an aspiring body of unwashed individuals had appeared during the day and commandeered the house. They had gone off after a while, threatening to return the next day.

We were too tired to pay much heed to the man's story. We lighted the fire in the billiard-room, and, burning the feathers off a couple of wild duck, hung them over the crackling logs to roast. The delicious odour of sizzling duck whetted our appetites.

Our feathered prizes lay scattered about the bare floor. There was enough food to last us several days. The single fox which Talin had shot was handed over to Vassili, the keeper, to be skinned and stuffed. It would go to increase the already numerous specimens of stuffed animals that covered the walls or stood about the room.

"That great bear in the corner was my first prize in that line," Talin said, pointing to a huge stuffed monster at the far end of the room. "We lay three days and nights in the dug-out waiting for him."

We looked at the great object with admiration. The huge hulking carcass seemed ready to lumber down upon us.

"Good heavens!" Boris exclaimed, springing to his feet and clutching his gun. "I swear I saw it move! It must be alive!"

A rollicking peal of laughter broke from the company. For a man with almost autocratic power, Boris stood our twitting well.

He raised his gun and threatened to put a bullet through the monster just to settle the question. A swift protest on the part of its proud possessor prevented him from carrying out his threat.

Thereupon we changed the subject and inspected the ducks, which were now browning nicely.

We had just ended a savoury meal when a face appeared at the window. The flickering flames of the log fire lit up the features of a hideous man. Cavernous, wild eyes, a wide slit nose, a large horse-like mouth and a fringe of red beard.

Before we had time to investigate the man's intentions, we were brought to our feet by a crash at the door leading on to the wooden terrace. Boris immediately seized his gun. We had left the others outside.

The shouts told us that there were several men. The door shook violently, and the glass panel was shattered. As the door burst open beneath the force of the blows, we pushed the billiard-table along and blocked the doorway.

To our horror we discovered we were at close quarters with bandits armed with rifles. Boris fired his gun to scare them, but the result was a volley of shots which cut through the woodwork as though it were made of cardboard.

Boris was wounded in the arm. For the sake of safety we dashed into the room adjoining, where the shutters were closed.

Some dark forms entered the smoke-filled billiard-room. We waited in thrilling suspense for a while. They could not

make up their minds which way to go, as there were open doors on three sides of the room.

It was a thrilling, fearful moment. The blood seemed to gallop through one's veins. Suddenly, just as we thought they had discovered our hiding-place, a wild shriek rent the air. We heard the scuttling of heavy boots on the creaking boards of the outer terrace.

In the dim smoke-ridden atmosphere of the billiard-room, we saw the huge stuffed bear staggering forward. It reeled outwards and collapsed against the upturned furniture.

Boris gave a whoop of delight. The bear had fallen down in the *melée* and scared the superstitious invaders. The bogey of the peasant mind was too much for them at close quarters.

We went over to the huddled carcass of fur and stuffing. To our astonishment there rose up from the unsightly ruin the form of a girl, dishevelled and aghast.

When we had sufficiently recovered from our amazement, we offered her a snack of roast duck and asked her to tell us her story.

She did so with gratitude. She was the daughter of a neighbouring landowner, and had been carried off by the forest robbers for the purpose of exacting a ransom from her parents. They had brought her to the log house that afternoon and shut her up in one of the cellars. She had succeeded in getting out and made a search for food. Finding nothing except a few rusks, and a little tea, she took the stuffing from the bear and burnt it for fuel and warmth.

When she suddenly heard voices, she thought the bandits had come back. She concealed herself behind the bear standing in the corner. She crouched there for a long while, hoping the bandits would soon go. When the shooting began she trembled for her life. At last the smell and heat of the bear and smoke became so stifling that she could stand it no longer. She must have fallen forward in a faint.

Boris tore at his hair in a wave of self-reproach.

"I shall never forgive myself for thinking of shooting at a stuffed bear!" he declared. "My stupidity might have cost you your life."

She just laughed and said death would have been a release for her. Her mind had been racked by terrible thoughts of life as a prisoner of the bandits. Then she insisted on looking after Boris's wound.

Next day we restored her to her anxious parents.

CHAPTER XXI

THE LAST MOMENTS OF THE GRAND DUCHESS ELIZABETH IN MOSCOW

BEING well acquainted with some pious Moscow people who attended the convent chapel of the Grand Duchess Elizabeth, I used to hear a good deal about the good work she was carrying on at her convent of mercy. Sometimes during the dark days immediately following the triumph of the Bolshevists, I accompanied my friends to Vespers in the convent chapel. There, one could always see the widow of the Grand Duke Serge, modestly clothed in her white veil and grey dress, standing at the head of her sisters, and singing the office of the Orthodox Church. After service, she would sometimes receive short visits from friends and talk over the situation of the country. Then, she would go back to her work of tending the sick and nursing the orphan children she had taken under her roof.

The convent was situated in the Bolshaya Ordynka, a secluded thoroughfare bordered by trees and quiet residences within a stone's throw of the Kremlin.

In that peaceful home, the Grand Duchess carried on her noble work on behalf of the indigent and afflicted. Visiting the bright, clean wards of the infirmary, one often saw her nursing the sick with her own hands and tending to the wants of her dear orphans. Though snobbish Russian aristocrats used, before the Revolution, to cry shame on her for degrading the idea of Royalty in the eyes of the people by nursing them with her own hands, they flocked to her for aid when their pride bit the dust.

Few women could have surpassed her in zeal for a good cause. Unlike those who were to be her murderers, she never spoke and doubtless never dreamed of loving humanity with the bloody weapons of world revolution, but preferred to exercise her love and devotion in self-effacement. She had no "program" and no banners, and no army of foreign soldiers to assist her. No one ever imagined that Lenin and Trotsky would thirst for the blood of so noble and gentle a woman. At first, the Red Guards were content to cause her and her community all the inconveniences of searches by day and night. These visitations were sprung upon the defenceless Sisters with a great show of brute force. Not infrequently Commissaries, mostly renegade Jews, would arrive at the Convent in the company of Chinese and Lettish soldiers, armed to the teeth, and subject the entire community to a ruthless search. The night searches were particularly harassing. The Grand Duchess and her Sisters and patients would be peacefully sleeping, when a loud stamping and knocking at the entrance gates would announce the arrival of the Bolshevists. Disregarding all respect for conventions, the intruders would enter and upset the entire community.

Living in a neighbouring house, I often saw the figures of the Red Guards stalking about the children's ward, where the windows were always left open at night.

The Grand Duchess never complained about these searches or of any indignity being offered to her more than to the rest of the house, but I gathered from her one Sunday after Vespers, that she had been officially informed by the Bolshevists that her work was superfluous and would soon be terminated by the Soviet. Voluntary works of mercy, they told her, were a hindrance and objectionable in a Socialistic State, where everything was to be run on systematic communal lines. Which statement soon turned out to mean "to be run on paper only."

One day in June 1918, I went to Vespers at the convent

chapel. The Grand Duchess was there as usual, standing with her nuns in the right wing by the sanctuary. The bright sun was streaming in through the high windows, making the white walls seem more glaring, and the futuristic highly-coloured figures of the angels, painted on the apse, stand out like floating ghosts.

The Grand Duchess' voice was heard among those of the sisters, but none of us thought, as we listened to her singing the "Nunc Dimittis," that it was really to be her last farewell.

The service was hardly over, when a couple of motor-cars, containing commissaries and Chinese and Lettish soldiers, armed from head to foot, drove into the convent yard. The commissaries sprang out of the cars, before the throng of worshippers, and announced in harsh tones that they were seeking "Citizeness Romanoff."

The Grand Duchess came forward and greeted them. The commissaries immediately informed her that she was to accompany them in the car. The rough hands of the Red Guards were laid on her arm, as if to impress upon her there must be no hesitation. At this unnecessary violence the crowd became alarmed. Someone called out that it was a shame to lay hands on so noble and defenceless a woman. In answer to this protest the Red Guards clicked the locks of their rifles with a menacing determination. As the crowd had completely surrounded the Grand Duchess and the excitement was very high, the Bolsheviks were prevented from carrying her off at once. Some of the sisters with tears in their eyes begged the commissaries to allow their Abbess to remain and take care of her patients. They were adamant, however, to all entreaties.

Meanwhile the Grand Duchess was able to say a few words to the sisters and people who crowded round her. I heard her tell them to take the utmost care of a little boy named Scalon, whom she had recently befriended. He was the cripple son of the Governor of Vladimir, who had been

obliged to flee for his life, leaving the boy with no roof or protection. During all this turmoil and excitement, the Grand Duchess seemed to entertain no thought for herself, but was entirely concerned with the welfare of her helpless patients.

A sister had meanwhile gathered up some clothing and packed it into a small valise, which she brought out of the house and placed in the car. It was all the Grand Duchess was allowed to take. At the last moment the commissaries yielded to her entreaties to allow one of her sisters to accompany her. The two defenceless women, clad in their simple convent robes, got into the motor-car with the commissaries. Behind them followed the second car, bristling with rifles, swords and revolvers, and graced with the grin of the Chinese soldiers.

As the cars drove away, the crowd was moved with a deep emotion, and in desperate tones called down on the saintly Grand Duchess the mercy of heaven. Many raised their eyes to the black cross on the chapel dome, crossed themselves, and, sinking on their knees, beat their brows against the earth. The prayers and good wishes, however, were of no avail against the blood-thirst of the Soviet. For many weeks desolation reigned among the sisters and patients the Grand Duchess had been obliged to leave. Appeal after appeal was made to Lenin and Trotsky to give protection to the saintly woman. But one day the Soviet newspaper announced with joy that "Bloody Nicholas and his gang of bloodsuckers had been wiped off the face of the earth," and called on the proletariat of Russia to rejoice at the victorious event. When questioned about the murder of the Grand Duchess Elizabeth, Lenin is said to have answered, "Virtue with a crown on it is a greater enemy to the world revolution than a hundred tyrant Tsars."

CHAPTER XXII

LIFE IN A BOLSHEVIST DUNGEON

I

HAVING seen so many of my Russian friends go down under the mailed fist of the Red monster, I felt it would not be long before I should come under its blows. I used to go to the Soviet Foreign Office, and try to persuade them to let me quit the country. I was always told I was being kept as a hostage. I was allowed to remain at liberty within the district of Moscow, where I warded off starvation by periodical trips to the peasants in the country. Once when I complained at the Soviet Foreign Office that if they wished to keep me as a hostage they should at least feed me, the commissary laughed in a devilish fashion, and said :

“ If you don't like starving to death, dance ! In any case, there will be one English dog less.”

Often some old Russian friends, themselves ruined and persecuted, would allow me to share their scanty meals, consisting sometimes of potato parings mixed with rye flour and made into cutlets. They would also allow me to sleep on a divan. They did all they could for me, till one day I returned from a visit to the Soviet to find the house occupied by commissaries, in leather jackets, and Red Guards. My friends' home had been “ socialised.” They were ruthlessly turned out into the street and could find no other shelter but a wood shed. There I discovered the

whole family, consisting of parents and seven children, the aged grandmother, two *prijhivalki* (women pensioners), and a couple of old servants who refused to abandon them in their plight.

I asked them if they had been able to rescue any of their belongings. The father, M. N——, replied in a trembling voice: "They said we could only take what they call a 'Soviet trousseau.' They allowed us to take one knife and fork, one shirt, one suit or dress, and one pair of boots. They said the rest of our belongings were to be left 'for the use of the comrades.'"

The children were all huddled together round the aged grandmother and the old nurse on some mattresses among the blocks of wood.

I had not been long at the shed before a commissary came. He was a tall, sallow youth of about eighteen years. He looked surlily at the family in the shed, and clutching his rifle, said:

"And soon we shall drive you out of here. The shed is for wood, not for manifest 'bloodsuckers.' Their place is under the earth."

He stamped the butt-end of his rifle threateningly on the ground and went off.

"Manifest counter-revolutionary or bloodsucker" was a common expression among the rougher adherents of the Soviet, and was applied to anyone who wore a collar and looked decent.

With M. N——, I watched the young commissary enter the old home, where the lights had been turned on. Through the large windows of the "socialised" house we could see the commissaries and Red Guards making merry with their inevitable women. As I was again without a bed, I went into the country around Moscow. I felt sure of finding a large-hearted peasant who would give a night's lodging, a jug of milk from the family cow, if it had escaped the ubiquitous claws of the Red Guards, a few boiled potatoes

and a piece of black bread. Unfortunately, it began to rain and my boots got soaked. I slept in the hut of a peasant, who used such strong language in describing the evil doings of the local "committee of village paupers," set up by Lenin as the sole governing authority in the villages, that I fell asleep quicker than I should otherwise have done. The peasant was so good as to give me a sack of potatoes, which I decided at once to take to Moscow to some starving friends.

When I arrived there I began to feel very ill. I had caught cold, and the Spanish influenza, which was raging throughout the land. A Russian friend offered to put me up in his house, which had not yet been "socialised." He did his best for me, declaring that "he valued life too highly to be reckless of it in whomsoever."

He provided me with a pair of silk pyjamas made from embroidered material brought back from Manchuria at the time of the Russo-Japanese war.

That night as I lay in bed in a high fever, a party of about ten Red Guards, headed by a Polish-Jewish commissary, burst into the house. They had come to search for food, fire-arms and counter-revolutionaries. The house had already been searched about a dozen times within a couple of months. Nevertheless, the Bolsheviks were only happy in making life unpleasant for their defenceless victims.

They marched into my room, and in spite of my illness, dragged me from the bed and cut the mattress with swords in the vain hope of finding food, money or arms. They threw everything out of the cupboards and "nationalised" my gold watch and other objects of value. I protested against the confiscation of my property, but they told me that the right to possess private property had been abolished. When I asked who was to become the possessor of my belongings, the commissary answered: "The People!"

I asked whether I, too, hadn't a right to belong to "The People." The commissary arched his eyebrows, and turning to the Red Guards, said:

"Do you hear that, comrades? He, too, wants to help us!"

"Counter-revolutionary! Bourgeois! Arrest him!" shouted the Red Guards in chorus, stamping the butt-ends of their rifles on the floor.

Having finished their search, they left the house and I crept back to bed. About half an hour later, the commissary returned with four soldiers—two Letts and two Chinamen. They entered my room and told me they had come to arrest me. They paid no heed whatever to the fact that I was ill with influenza. When I asked by whose order they were to arrest me, the commissary pointed his revolver at me, but did not utter a word. But for the Red Guards behind him, I felt sure he would drop it and run if a pop-gun had been fired. But behind him stood the Letts and Chinamen. With revolvers and rifles bristling around me I had no choice.

I got out of bed and was about to put on a day suit, when a Bolshevik barred my arm with his rifle.

"Leave that!" he ordered.

"Surely I may dress?" I replied.

"You are dressed already," said the Commissary.

"But these are merely pyjamas!" I protested.

"That's quite enough!" he replied. "It's a bourgeois prejudice to want more than one suit."

I just had time to slip on a pair of bedroom slippers when I was seized by the two Chinamen. I realised it was useless to resist.

Led by the commissary and followed by the Red Guards, I was conducted downstairs and through the deserted streets to a large old house in the Georgievski Square. There I was taken before some Bolshevik women and soldiers, who asked me a number of questions and cracked coarse jokes at my expense. When they had finished examining me, a young woman, with bobbed hair and a "modern" look, cried out:

“ Take the English rabble (*svoloch*) downstairs ! ” and then started an unseemly dance with a soldier, to the accompaniment of whistling and shouts.

I was immediately seized by the Chinese Red Guards, who grinned at me in a sickly manner. I was led down a flight of stone steps and along a dark, clammy corridor, at the end of which was an iron grille. This was opened, together with a door, and with a brutal thrust in the back from the butt-end of a rifle I was thrown suddenly into utter darkness.

I saw nothing. The smell of the place was so terrible that I felt it like a heavy cloak. After a few seconds I heard harsh voices and was surrounded by invisible people, who felt me from head to foot with their cold, bony hands.

“ Have you brought any food ? ” was their only cry.

“ *Nichevo* ” (nothing) was all I could answer.

Some of them were enraged at this reply.

“ Another mouth to devour what little we get ! ” they said with curses.

Every new prisoner was searched by the inmates of the dungeon in the same manner. When the noise of the starving prisoners had ceased, the soft cultured voice of a lady came through the darkness, asking me why I had been arrested. I endeavoured to go in the direction of the voice, as it came as a great relief after the coarse and futile ravings of the others. I stumbled over the bodies of prisoners who were trying to sleep on the damp stone floor. A gentle hand came out from the darkness and led me across the bodies to the wall.

“ I have made a little seat here with some blocks of wood, ” she said. “ Will you come and share it ? ”

When I told her that I was English, she expressed her pleasure in that language.

“ I am a colonel’s wife, ” she told me. “ Though I am seventy-five years old they have arrested me and thrown me into this dungeon for some reason which I cannot at all imagine. ”

When I told this kind "voice" that I was very ill and merely dressed in pyjamas, I heard a little rustling sound by my side and immediately something soft and warm was thrust into my arms.

"Put this on!" the voice entreated me. "It is a woollen petticoat. It will keep you warm. I have another for myself."

The kind voice obliged me to accept the offer and I put the garment on.

The voice told the rest of the invisible company about my plight and soon afterwards another warm garment came to me from out of the darkness, and a gruff, pleasant voice begged me to accept it as a protection against the damp and cold. I asked who my kind and invisible benefactor was, and the same gruff, but pleasant, voice, told me that he was a working-man, who with thirty others had been arrested by the Bolsheviks for going on strike.

From time to time, the door of the dungeon was opened and new prisoners were brought in. One was a working-woman, who cried out in hysterical voice that the Bolsheviks had obliged her to leave her suckling baby at home. She was almost driven out of her mind by the fear lest her baby should die of starvation before she was released from the dungeon. She kept up her hysterical wailing till she sank upon the stone floor in a state of utter exhaustion.

Later on, when the pale dawn sent a ghastly light through the small grating, an old man of eighty-five was brought in. He had long white locks and a flowing beard. He coughed incessantly, and was evidently very ill. Between his fits of coughing, he told us that he had been denounced to the Bolsheviks as a counter-revolutionary by his own drunken son, whom he could no longer supply with money for his orgies.

There was a small window like a coal-shoot at the top of the wall, and the faint light penetrating through the mud-stained glass into the clammy dungeon sufficed to show

me the forms and faces of my fellow-prisoners. They numbered about fifty, and were all working-men and women save the Colonel's wife and a Polish gentleman, who still wore the white kid gloves in which he had been arrested.

From their conversation I gathered that most of them were social revolutionaries and employees of the Prokhoroff Factory. They had refused to elect Bolsheviks into their factory soviet, and had also gone on strike against certain dictatorial measures imposed upon them by the Central Soviet. They considered this to be cheating the workers of their right of self-determination and control, a right proclaimed and secured before Lenin and his party got into power. They objected to their factory soviet becoming just a machine for carrying out the orders of the Central Soviet without reference to their local requirements. They had gone on strike against an order from Lenin and his Government, and for so doing they were declared counter-revolutionaries and arrested in a body.

From time to time a commissary visited the dungeon and called out a few names. The unfortunate owners were led away after endeavouring to bid farewell to their fellow-prisoners in a heart-rending manner. When the bolts were shot in the door behind them an awful silence came over us. A few minutes passed, and we heard the sound of firing in the back yard. Sometimes we waited in vain to hear the report of the guns, and after a long, throbbing suspense concluded that the prisoners had been set free.

About eleven o'clock in the morning a Bolshevik woman brought us a pot of potatoes and some hot water in a pail containing a small piece of fish. At about six in the evening we received the same fare. It was just sufficient to keep body and soul together.

Once we had a treat. A kind Russian guard, who had taken the place of a surly-faced Lett, brought us a pile of dried fish called *Vobla*. I think it is caught in the Volga. We made a banquet of it. It was so hard that we had to

knock it against the stone wall, and then pieces of the fish detached themselves like chips of rock. It had a pleasant taste, and kept our mouths busy making it fit to swallow.

However, during the three weeks that I spent in the dungeon, there were three or four occasions on which no food at all was brought to the prisoners for the space of two days. We were told this was due to the "economic collapse" which the social-revolutionary peasants were trying to bring about in order to undermine the power of the proletariat.

No one was allowed out of the prison except to be shot or liberated. For other purposes there was no consideration. The soup-pail did not always return at once to the kitchen.

A couple of days after his arrival, the old man of eighty-five fell seriously ill. He had lain all the time on the cold stones, and was damp with the rain which came through the window on a level with the street. The prisoners begged that a doctor or at least a priest might be sent to him. When a priest was asked for, the commissary replied :

" We've abolished the Almighty ! "

When a doctor was requested, the commissary replied :

" Let the old man die ! He's of no use to the State. "

The old man's body was left among us for two days.



CHILDREN ESPECIALLY TRAINED TO IMPRESS FOREIGN VISITORS TO
MOSCOW.



PROCESSION OF EASTERN WOMEN IN CONNECTION WITH THE SOVIET
CAMPAIGN FOR "ROUSING THE ORIENT"

CHAPTER XXIII

LIFE IN A BOLSHEVIST DUNGEON (*continued*)

II

It became more and more evident that the fate of the majority of my fellow-prisoners was to be shot. Some would be allowed to linger in the dungeon several days before their names were called and they were led away to die; others, mostly young working-men, were brought in from the town, and had scarcely time to tell their story to their fellow-prisoners before the bolts were drawn and the door thrown open once again.

The commissaries then appeared, accompanied by Chinese executioners with rifles, called out the names of their victims and led them away, crying out with fanatical puerile fervour to the rest of the prisoners the Bolshevik triple war-whoop: "Long live the World Revolution! Long live the Red Terror! Death to the enemies of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat!"

The door was slammed with great violence *in terrorem*, the bolts shot, and the footsteps of the condemned men and their executioners died away in the corridor. An awful silence fell upon the prisoners in the dungeon. A few minutes passed and the silence was broken by the sound of the rifle volleys, followed by the triumphant shouts of the commissaries.

I cannot forget the case of one young working-man, who was brought into the prison with his mother. He was a fitter and declared that, far from being a counter-revolutionary, he was a great admirer of Tolstoy, and based

his conduct on the principle, "Resist not evil." He had, however, committed the "crime" of agitating among his fellow workers for the election of social revolutionaries to the Workmen's Council, to the detriment of the unpopular Communist candidates.

His "counter-revolutionary activity" consisted also in openly advocating the self-determination of the Russian people by means of a Constituent Assembly elected by universal suffrage. His appeal that the Russian people should themselves determine their form of government was considered by the Bolsheviks as criminal opposition to the dictatorship of the Proletariat.

The young man was condemned to be shot. When the Chinese executioners entered the dungeon to lead him away, his mother clasped him to her bosom, crying out in a voice of despair and supplication: "My son! my son! Do not kill my son!"

The Jewish commissaries shouted to her not to impede their task, and the Chinamen beat her with their rifles. She could not be persuaded to give up her son, for whose life she pleaded, asking what evil he had done.

The commissaries were extremely wrathful at such manifestations of spirit and ordered the mother to be shot "for opposing the authority of the Soviet." She was dragged away, still clinging to her son. Her frantic cries penetrated to the dungeon for a considerable time. At length the sound of firing reached us and the cries ceased. We were, however, unable to ascertain whether the unfortunate woman shared her son's fate.

The old lady who was the wife of a Russian colonel told me she had been arrested while she was cooking a meal for her sick husband. She had managed to put on some extra clothing and was glad to be able to help me with part of it. She spoke French and Italian, besides English, and was very well acquainted with English literature. She took a great interest in all the prisoners, especially the

women, whom she endeavoured to console and encourage. Whenever a woman prisoner was brought in, she would speak to her in kind tones and assure her that, notwithstanding the coldness of the dungeon, there were warm hearts among the prisoners. Her presence was of inestimable value.

It frequently happened that a woman would be brutally thrust into the dungeon and the iron doors would be slammed with violence behind her. The unfortunate woman would stare for a moment with eyes aghast with horror and then lurch forward in a swoon or break into hysterical shrieks. The men would rush forward to save the woman from falling violently to the stone floor, while the colonel's wife would embrace her, soothing her with gentle words. I do not know the fate of this sweet woman. She was still in the dungeon irradiating her kindness and charity among the prisoners when I left it. She told me that she had welcomed the First Revolution and had hoped that a democratic form of government would be set up in Russia.

"I had so deep a faith in the goodness of the Russian people," she said, "that after the revolution of February 1917 I looked forward to Russia's future with rainbow hopes."

Of the working-men, who formed the bulk of the prisoners, not one had any sympathy for the Communist régime. Indeed, they were its most ardent opponents, and expressed their indignation¹ at the Bolshevist tyranny in words which showed little respect for feminine ears. They considered the Communists as having got their power by treachery, and as men who denied in practice all the fairest promises they had made to the working-classes. They had merely baited the latter with catch-phrases and false words.

Whenever a condemned working-man was taken out for execution, he would answer the commissary's shout: "Death to the enemies of Communism! etc.," with the

counter-cry: "Long live the liberties of the Russian people!"

The phrase I heard most frequently on the lips of the working-men was:

"They (the Communists) are not people, they are beasts" (*Oni nye lyudi, oni zvieri*).

They were all conscious that no mercy could be expected of the Communists. They were confident the Communists would not be able to maintain their power for many years. When I asked why they thought so, they usually replied that the Bolshevists were sitting on a powder cask which was likely at any moment to blow up.

But I feared that once the Bolshevists had got rid of the fighting elements of the people, they would find the remaining millions accepting their servile lot just as they put up with the yoke of the Tartars for over four hundred years, and that of the Tsars since Peter the Great. Russia would return to be a land of dull peasants scratching their plot of ground and caring nothing about the towns.

But these workmen in the dungeon were all desirous that Russians should elect their own form of government. They asked me whether the British workmen sympathised with them in their struggle to throw off the Communists' yoke. Believing Britons still to be Britons, I assured them that the British working-men valued their own liberties very highly, and detested tyranny in every shape and form. They could not do less than sympathise with the crushed democracy of Russia.

The prisoners were always greatly pleased when I told them this, and more than once gave a good cheer for the "land of liberty," to which they had been taught to look for example and precept. Once such a cheer brought the commissaries down, and a few men were promptly picked out for execution.

III

None of the prisoners was given an opportunity of defending his life. His fate was settled upstairs by some men calling themselves "The Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-revolution, Sabotage and Speculation." To shoot or not to shoot seemed to be the only question. When that was settled, the prisoner was called from the dungeon, either to be shot in the back yard, or set free—with a great dread of returning to the dungeon and a worse fate.

Among the fresh prisoners who were brought in were some Russian Intelligents, but the Communists seemed to be particularly harsh and spiteful towards working-men who would not bow the knee to their creed and rule. Those who were not shot were obliged to listen to the fiery addresses of young commissaries from the School of Propaganda who endeavoured to convert the working-men to Communism by vividly portraying the evils of the non-Bolshevist past and drawing rosy, elaborate pictures of the Bolshevist future. Oh, the glorious beauties of the future! Paradise was to be drawn down to earth by the great Communist magnet.

But, of course, we had only the grim realities of our dungeon existence to console us for the absence of the paradise to be.

As the working men showed little appetite for the Communist future, the propagandists finished their speeches with the direst threats of the Red Terror, and declared that the actual failure of the Communist paradise to appear was due to the British Government.

Sometimes a commissary would come to tell us, with a look of fanatical triumph in his eyes, that a bloody revolution had begun in England, where the Royal Family and Mr. Lloyd George had been executed, and that the British Soviets were sentencing to death "hordes of counter-revolutionary rabble, such as the House of Lords and the

House of Commons." The prisoners listened without comment to all that was said. As soon as the commissary had gone, however, they expressed their opinions in very vigorous language.

IV

One night a youth of eighteen was brought in. His fiancée was devoted to him, and made enquiries among the Red Guards concerning the situation of the dungeon. For a small sum she was told where to find the grating. At night she would come with cold potatoes, boiled in the skins, and drop them into the grating, so that they rolled down into the dungeon. In this manner we were able, for a short time, to receive a valuable supplement to our wretched fare. Unhappily, the boy was taken out and shot in the back yard a few days after his arrival. None of us had stomach enough to break the mournful news to the faithful fiancée, but she guessed the truth when the boy no longer answered her whispered greeting or gave a sign of his presence. Her visits ceased, and no more potatoes rolled down into the dungeon to fill our aching stomachs.

The lack of proper food, the mephitic smell, the impossibility of resting my aching limbs, except on the damp, cold and vermin-covered stone floor, the frequent removal and shooting of the prisoners, and the constant expectation of a similar fate—the haunting knowledge which filled the minds of all the prisoners of being mute and helpless victims at the mercy of men with the minds of devils, vied with my illness in lowering my vitality. At last, some kind working men made me a bed with their coats, which they were doomed not to take back, for a few days after their good action they were taken out and shot. When they were led out for execution, one of them said to the remaining prisoners :

" Good-bye, comrades ! Take care of the young Englishman. He is an ally."

One day a couple of commissaries arrived and ordered all the prisoners upstairs. Many of them lost their nerve altogether, expecting the prisoners would be shot *en masse*. We were lined up against a blood-bespattered wall, while in front of us stood a row of Letts and Chinamen with rifles. The young commissaries seemed to indulge in an orgy of activity, giving orders and cancelling them with manifest delight of power. The agitation among the prisoners was indescribable. The women became hysterical. The colonel's wife, however, carried her seventy-five years with the greatest dignity, and was ready to meet death with calm resignation.

The commissaries decided not to make an end of us without exercising their talent for propaganda. Accordingly, both commissaries harangued us on the futility of opposing the Communist Dictatorship, and on the aims of the Red Terror. They ended their speeches in the usual way, shouting " Long live the Soviet Republic ! Death to the enemies of the Communist World Revolution ! " The Letts and Chinamen all shouted " Death ! death ! " and grasped their rifles more firmly. Then the order was given to them to level their rifles. An awful scene followed. Some men and women swooned and fell on the ground. There were piercing shrieks of despair and cries of defiance.

Still the rifles were pointed at us with silent threat. The commissary shouted " One, two, three—fire ! "

The volley of the rifles sounded like a clap of thunder. For the moment I was completely dazed. When I recovered my sight, I saw clouds before me ; I quickly realised, however, that it was the smoke of the rifles. As it grew thinner I could distinguish the grinning faces of the delighted Chinamen and the morose faces of the surly Letts. The commissaries laughed loudly and shouted : " See how they tremble ! It must be supposed that there is no more

counter-revolution left in them. Long live the Red Terror ! ”

The prisoners were then sent back to the dungeon.

One day my name was called out. I was conducted upstairs and led before the members of the “ Extraordinary Commission.” They were seated at a table on which lay a number of my personal documents, letters, etc.

Many questions were put to me about my political faith. At last one of the men picked up a letter and said to me in English :

“ Your name is Shelley. Are you a grandson of the poet ? ”

If he had known the truth, he would have realised that the poet had no direct descendants living. But I evaded the question and asked him why he enquired.

“ He was one of the forerunners of Communism,” he replied, sententiously. “ We are putting up a monument to him.”

I wondered what the poor poet would have thought had he known that his star-like soul was to be hitched to the corpse-laden waggon of Bolshevism.

For my edification the Commissary recited the following lines from the “ Masque of Anarchy ” :

“ Rise like lions after slumber
In unvanquishable number,
Shake your chains to earth like dew
Which in sleep has fallen on you,
Ye are many, they are few ! ”

As the cannibals, who put the missionaries in the stew pot, might have quoted the poet with equal justification, I did not feel convinced. In any case, if people rise they ought to be sure of what they get when they do so. The Russians might apply the verse to the Communist clique that tyrannise them.

After this little incident I was told to be off (*Stoopai !*),

which I did as quick as my weak legs would carry me. Delighted to be free at last, I left the Soviet house and went to my friend's home in the hope of getting a bath, a bed, a change of linen and clothes. To my great consternation I saw over the door a red flag, on which was written "Communist Club." I entered the house very cautiously, but was stopped by a commissary, he told me that the house had been "socialised."

My friends had been turned out with nothing but the usual "Bolshevist trousseau" of one knife, one fork, one shirt, one dress, and one pair of boots. All my clothing and possessions had been divided up among the "comrades." Once again I found myself without a roof. I succeeded, however, in borrowing a suit of clothes from the man who lived in the small lodge at the entrance gates.

I was very ill, and some friends advised me to go down into the country and live with the peasants, where there was more chance of getting food. I found a peasant who allowed me to ride in his cart to New Jerusalem, a place I knew well, about forty miles outside Moscow. He was a nice old peasant, and called me "little dove" (*goloobchik*). He told me that both his own sons (little doves he called them) had recently been shot by the local "Committee of Village Paupers."

"Little dove," he said, as we jolted along. "What devils are these Bolshevists. They believe neither in God nor devil. They are Anti-Christ." When we arrived at his *izba*, he asked me whether I would like to sleep with the family on the brick stove. There were ten children who, it appeared, all shared the same oblong stove for a bed at night. I declined the warmth of the stove and company, suggesting that a bed of straw might be made up for me in the corner beneath the ikon of the Virgin Mary.

I lay for a few weeks on that welcome bed, for I fell ill with what appeared to be pneumonia. Hearing that I was unwell, the neighbouring peasants came to see me frequently

and brought butter, eggs, milk, bread and chickens for me. I was also visited by the Bolshevik president of the "Committee of Village Paupers" who ran the government there, terrorising the neighbourhood. He threatened to arrest me as a "manifest counter-revolutionary." The peasants, however, threatened his life if he arrested me during my illness. He therefore sent his youthful aid to "enquire into the counter-revolutionary activity of the English dog," which is putting it mildly.

The youthful aid turned out to be a Russian. He had not gall enough to be unkind to me, and soon began to repeat his visits in order to relate to me how he confiscated ("socialised") other people's property. Once he "socialised" a sheep for my benefit. He brought it to the *izba* and told me I must feed myself up with it. I asked, however, that it should be returned to its owner.

During his visits he told me that he had heard most wonderful things about England from the Jewish commissaries who lived in London. They had told him that Britain was the wealthiest land of capitalism and that its inhabitants were anxious to adopt Bolshevism. He beheld me with a feeling of wonder as a connecting link with the fabulous wealth of England, in the Bolshevisation of which he repeatedly expressed a desire to participate. He had grown somewhat tired of abolishing private property among the peasants.

Lenin had ordered all authority in the villages to be handed over to the dregs of the rural population. These were usually headed by a commissary from Moscow, whose task it was to keep alive "the flame of Revolutionary wrath." My young commissary had never done anything useful in his life and had, therefore, neither money nor morals. For this reason, perhaps, he had found no difficulty in becoming a member of the governing body known as the Committee of Village Paupers, and in lending an eager hand in terrorising the peasants.

The first meeting to which he took me was called by the peasants of several neighbouring villages. They were extremely dissatisfied with the Communist régime, and refused to yield up their produce in the name of Karl Marx. A few days before the meeting some commissaries had been sent from Moscow to confiscate the crops. The peasants were willing to sell their grain for a price in accordance with the cost of manufactured articles. The factory hands, however, were receiving enormous wages, and yet not producing enough for their own needs. The peasants strongly objected to being paid with worthless paper money. They were so outraged by the proposals of the commissaries, that they made a speedy and bloody end of them.

A few days after, two other commissaries were despatched from Moscow to the rebellious peasants. The latter were summoned to a meeting, to which I was taken by my young commissary. They had come together armed with various agricultural implements. The Red Guards alone carried fire-arms. The peasants were aflame with feelings of bitter hostility towards the two young commissaries from Moscow. There was much talk of killing them on the spot. One old, long-haired peasant said to me: "What is a commissary? Not Tsar, not Pope, nor landowner! A pest unheard of in the land of Russia! The devil himself with a rifle in his hand! He goes about and takes your cow, your grain, your money, your children, your hut, and if he likes, your very life!"

The shouting among the peasants was very loud and uncouth. It looked at one moment as though the commissaries would be done to death. Suddenly one of them sprang upon a cart and began to harangue the crowd in most eloquent and passionate language. The peasants were so struck by the fervour of his speech, that they stood mute with astonishment. The young Jew tore open his shirt-front, bared his breast and held out his open hands.

"I am at your mercy," he said. "Do with me what you

will. Plunge your weapons into my heart. Only remember this : Behind me in Moscow stand the Red Guards. They will avenge my death by shooting every man of you, and will raze your villages to the ground."

Having cowed the peasants in this dramatic manner, he went on with a long speech of wily propaganda. He endeavoured to get the peasants to look upon the Bolshevists as their defenders. He told them fearful things of what would happen if Kerensky's party regained power.

"Every tree along the countryside will be black with your bodies, and the boughs will groan and creak as the wind blows the dangling corpses to and fro!"

So morbidly terrible was the picture he painted of the future of the peasants if the Bolshevists were overthrown, that they were completely unnerved and begged him to take all their grain.

That night the triumphant commissaries left with a row of carts loaded with sacks of grain. Next day the peasants were doubly furious. Night had brought wisdom and they were furious against the Bolshevists for their cunning, and against themselves for their weakness. They held another meeting at which they ventilated their feelings. The young commissary asked me to accompany him. The wife of a peasant whose grain had been confiscated was so indignant that the commissary arrested her for "counter-revolutionary activity." The Red Guards seized her and awaited the order to shoot her on the spot. The peasants were enraged, but looked askance at the rifles of the Red Guards. I was so much moved by the brutal injustice of the affair, that I clutched my young commissary by the arm and begged him to spare the woman's life. He was moved by a wave of anger at my interference with his authority before the peasants and swore at me coarsely.

"She has opposed the Soviet authority!" he shouted.

"Are you afraid of a *baba*" (peasant woman)? This single word seemed to enlighten him and his wrath subsided.

"Let the *baba* free!" he shouted to the Red Guards.

One day I visited with him the monastery of New Jerusalem, of which the speckled, pagoda-like domes tower above hill and forest. Accompanied by ten Red Guards, we appeared at the great portal. The young commissary ignored the bell and knocked loudly at the door with the butt end of his rifle. Excited whispering was heard and the movement of hurrying feet. The door was opened at last and we entered. A number of half-scared monks met us. The commissary informed them that all the livestock of the monastery farm was to be "socialised." This announcement greatly perturbed the monks, but they could not oppose the commissary's power. Before the Red Guards left the cloister, they suddenly fired their rifles into the air to scare the peaceful inmates.

Some days after, the Patriarch Tikhon came from Moscow to advise the monks and to address the peasants, who were greatly enraged at the action of the Bolshevists. I went to the service in the monastery church, which was crowded with worshippers. The Patriarch was received with touching manifestations of respect. The Red Guards, however, entered the church and forbade him to address the people. One of the monks, who had visited me in my illness, presented me to the Patriarch, who declared the leading Communists to be foreign haters of Russia.

CHAPTER XXIV

ESCAPE FROM THE RED MADHOUSE

WHEN I came back to town after my release from the Soviet dungeon and subsequent stay in the country, I started to look about me for a means of escaping from Russia. The great trek of the educated classes had been in full swing for a long time. Massacre after massacre was carried out by the Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution. I was tired to death of watching my Russian friends' misery, not being able to help them and dependent for my own food and lodging on their kindness. True, I rummaged for food with their grown-up sons and shared the dangers, but it was a dull sort of martyrdom to be forever at the disposal of the Soviets for any occasion on which they chose to bully me in their foul prisons or cut my throat.

Only those who have lived, not with the Reds feasting and hob-nobbing with commissars, but under the constant threat of their displeasure, know how terrible and deadening the atmosphere of Russia was. For ever people were like miserable slaves, chained and helpless, waiting for the butchering monsters to kill them off.

Night searches went on without ceasing. No educated man or woman, not belonging to the Bolshevik order, could go to bed without dreading an incursion of Red Guards during the night, and landing in some loathsome prison.

Babushka, the old lady, took pity on me because I had no roof. She let me sleep in the drawing-room on the Turkish divan. Three times in one week the house was

searched at night, and all the flour and potatoes we had managed to procure, carted ruthlessly away. Again I was escorted to a local Soviet and shut up with pitiful prisoners. It was an old house near the Kremlin. During the three days I languished there, I could at least look out at the passers-by in the street and talk freely with the Guards.

The morning after my arrest, I saw a great ado in the street. Red soldiers and a crowd of men with banners were parading up and down.

"Red Russia greets her English comrades!" I read on a great banner. There was much blowing of trumpets, marching about, and great shouts of greeting, wild cheers for the World Revolution. Calling out to my guard, a rosy Russian youth with blue eyes, I asked him what all the pother was about.

"Distinguished visitors from England and America," he replied. "The Soviet Government is showing them the Revolution."

An idea came suddenly into my head. I asked the guard for a scrap of paper and a pencil. He got them willingly and waited to see what I would do with them.

Hastily I scribbled a note in English, repeating it afterwards in Russian so that there might be no suspicion on the part of the messenger:

"To the British or American visitors:

"Being in prison for the second time for no fault of mine, I beg you to take what steps you can to secure my release. I am a British subject detained in Russia as a hostage. I should be very grateful for your assistance in obtaining permission from the Government to be allowed to return to England."

The young guard promised to take it himself to the house where the visitors were being looked after by the Soviet Government.

In great hopes I waited for a reply, daring so much as to hope for a visit. What a treat, what a joy it would have been to be visited in the prison by an English or American friend of the Soviets, anxious to see a bit of the truth on the spot. Alas! hope *does* spring eternal in the human breast, but it never once induced these distinguished friends of Bolshevism to visit the innocent victims of it. Instead, they hob-nobbed with the smooth-tongued, modest tyrants of Russia, allowed themselves to be feasted, shown the glories of past bourgeois activities passed off as the fruits of the Red régime, and given their daily bread at the Wireless Telegraphy station.

I am quite convinced most of these friends of Sovietism were not sincere. They took no trouble to lift the veil so discreetly painted and arranged for them by their Soviet hosts. I concluded they were just moved by ambition, laying the path of their unenviable political career across the untold sufferings of the Russian people. And the poor Russian goes on suffering, just as he suffered the Tsarist yoke for two hundred years, getting rid of it by a mere fluke. The guests of the Soviet turned a deaf ear and a blind eye to all his misery. The least bit of charity would have prevented them from offering incense to his persecutors.

My release from this prison was due to the young guard. A good number of Russians had been taken out and shot by order of the Cheka, the commission for fighting counter-revolution. During their confinement, many of these unfortunate men and women, mostly respectable working folk and highly educated people accustomed to express their views, had grown to like the rosy-cheeked, blue-eyed young guard. He had looked after their wants with a kind heart and done all he could to make their lot bearable. He once told me of a beautiful young countess who had been brought in by the Chinese Red Guards.

"It's a sin, Barin!" he declared in his slow, slightly, wailing voice. "It's a sin to treat such a beautiful girl

like that. What has she done? She railed at the Government because they shot her father and turned her family out of their house. Counter-revolutionary, they call her. Lord help her! They insult her and take away her clothing."

He spat on the ground in contempt and indignation.

"Sons of——!" he exclaimed, with an emphasis that revealed a murky depth behind his usual mild manner.

He began to feel so strongly regarding the poor girl's fate that he gave one the impression of being in love. When he came to tell me they had shot her, he wept like a child.

"She was so kind!" he sobbed. "Look, she gave me her little gold cross as she passed me on the way to the firing squad in the backyard. 'Take it, little dove,' she said with a smile. 'Thank you for your kindness. It is sweeter to me than the scent of a funeral wreath. Till we meet again, little brother!' They took her outside, the Chinese executioners. I put my fingers in my ears, for my heart was beating like a hammer, and I feared the noise of the guns. They fired at her badly, for she sang 'God save the Tsar,' when they pointed the guns at her. She fell down wounded, and they finished her off by stabbing her through with their bayonets. *Akh*, devils! They torture the people! They torture the people!"

Towards evening when there was a lull in the come-and-go in the building, Vanya the Guard came into my room and whispered a word or two. He was sick to death of his job. He couldn't stand the sight of so much killing. "They torture the people," he kept harping. He was going to slip off to his native village miles away in the country. It would be more peaceful there, although not altogether, because the Bolsheviks carried death and misery into every peaceful spot. But there was space in the country. He was going to slip away at once. He was on guard at the street door. If I went down with him I could slip away at the same time.

A few minutes later I was outside and on my way to my friends.

They were living in a house on the Sadovaya Square. I had scarcely had time to enter their flat when a couple of Lettish soldiers arrived. I thought they were going to arrest me, but to my relief they asked for the father of my friends, M. Krivosheine, who had been Minister of Agriculture under the Tsar.

Fortunately he was not in the house, but the soldiers and the Polish commissary who accompanied them, locked us all in, hoping that M. Krivosheine would return home and walk into the trap.

Madame Krivosheine and her sons were subjected to a long examination by the commissar. Eliciting nothing from them, he turned to me and asked me where the examiner was. I pretended I could not understand a word of Russian. He put the question in German and I shrugged my shoulders. Then he spoke to me in French. An idea flashed through my brain.

Slowly and haltingly I replied, holding out my open palms :
“ *Je suisse pas une Russe !* ”

My bad grammar and ignorance of languages so struck the commissar that he spat on the floor and gave me up for hopeless.

A little later they left the house. Rushing up to the Board of Morosoff Factories, where M. Krivosheine was a director, we were delighted to hear that he had made good his escape. For a long time he had been obliged to pay secret agents to keep him informed of the Bolsheviks' intentions against his person. A few minutes before his intended arrest, a secret agent had turned up to inform him that his name was down on a list of persons set down “ for liquidation.” Such was the cynical term used by the Soviet in expressing its intention of putting its victims to death.

The Red Guards had arrived at the offices of the Board, but their first move was to enter the counting-house and

appropriate what money they could find. While they were there M. Krivosheine calmly put on his hat and walked out, making his way to the South.

The appalling sense of insecurity and the everyday scenes of savagery made me redouble my efforts to get out of the country. I went to the Soviet Foreign Office near the Grand Theatre and tried to interview the leading Bolsheviks. For a long time I failed to get beyond a young London Jew named Jacobs, who was attached to Karakhan. He would always tell me that I could not leave Russia, because the Soviet Government must have hostages. The British Government were perpetrating unheard-of atrocities against Bolsheviks in England. In his oily accent he described with abundant, heart-rending imagery and passion the sufferings of Bolsheviks in British prisons and camps. The British Government were giving their prisoners slow poison, inoculating them with the virus of a foul disease, sending them to work in mines without proper safeguards, so that they died from asphyxiation, etc., etc.

Of course, I could not deny these astounding assertions, not being in correspondence with the outside world. In Russia they were the only news obtainable concerning Capitalist countries, for none but the Bolshevik Press was allowed to exist, and contradiction often meant the risk of accusation for counter-revolutionary activity and consequent death.

Finding I made no progress towards my goal with this quondam East End tailor, I thought of getting to Petrograd and trying my luck there. I should, at least, be near the Finnish frontier. Chance, however, stepped in again. I had to find fresh lodgings because my friends were either shot or turned out of their house. I found a new shelter in the house of M. Stookin, who possessed a marvellous collection of paintings by Matisse, Césanne and the French Post-impressionists.

One day a short, pale, blue-eyed woman came into the dining room with the aid of a stick. Round her head was a garland of hair done into plaits. Hearing I was an Englishman she smiled at me, and said in a charmingly, sweet, almost long-suffering voice :

“ I suppose you are ashamed of us ? ”

She was Madame Pokrovskaya, wife of the Bolshevik Professor Pokrovsky, a member of Lenin's Government. Although cousin to M. Stookin, who was a millionaire, she had devoted her life to the Bolshevik cause since its inception, having spent many years in exile abroad. The Soviet sent her to Lausanne as their first woman consul, but she had to return to Russia.

I conversed with her day after day, as she had come to stay in the house, till Prince Yusoopoff's palace would be ready for her and her husband.

In spite of her mild eyes, her gentle voice, her limping walk, she thought nothing of millions of people being put to death for the triumph of the ideas of her Party. Being one of the founders of the Bolshevik Party, she explained its views with authority.

“ Why do you subject Russia to this cruel experiment ? ” I asked her. “ The Russians did not ask you to govern them. Your Party failed in the elections for the Constituent Assembly. You seized power with the aid of foreign Lettish mercenaries, and you have plunged Russia into an ocean of bloodshed.”

“ You have not learnt to think scientifically,” she replied, quite calm and self assured. “ We are striving to get rid of all the frauds that afflict humanity and to destroy the Capitalist system, which is the cause of all the misery in the world.”

“ But you are causing it ! ” I protested. “ You are putting more people to death than any civilised Government would dare.”

“ You must look at the matter scientifically,” she replied,

“without any feeling whatever. Capitalism is the cause of wars. Count the number who have shed their blood in the wars of Capitalism. If we destroy capitalism, we destroy the cause of war. Perhaps we are obliged to bring about the death of a few million people, but what is that in the long run? We shall make the world safe from war in the future and humanity will bless us for ever as its saviours.”

“But if you don't succeed?” I asked. “Most people don't like you, and hate your methods!”

“They are blinded by old prejudices,” she calmly replied. “We must succeed, even though it means performing an operation that lets a lot of blood. With the dictatorship of the Proletariat we can forcibly remove all opposing elements.”

“But who gave you authority to say that your system is the only right one?”

“Science!” she answered. “Our system is the logical conclusion of scientific research. There is no God. Morality has no foundation except as an economic necessity. The possession of the means of wealth determines all the values of life.”

She expounded to me the tenets of her Bolshevik materialism. Sincerity rang in her voice, but it was the sincerity of the cold-blooded fanatic to whom all insincerity, treachery, bloodshed and evil deeds are lawful means for attaining the fulfilment of a personal idea.

I taunted her gently with the fact that Russia was being bled to satisfy the lust for power of a small group of men who had spent most of their lives abroad. They were mostly all like her, mild voiced and harmless to look at.

“Not one of you would risk his skin!” I said. “When you were seizing power, you all lay in hiding-places and payed your Letts and Chinese to do the fighting for you. Even now, you pay these men to carry out these awful executions. Are you not too careful of your own skins?”

"We are just headquarters," she replied. "Every army needs to keep its generals in safety."

But for her appalling heartlessness regarding the suffering of people she did not see, though they were the victims of her fanatical school of thought, Madame Pokrovskaya seemed a simple, unpretentious woman. Her presence in the house naturally brought in a host of Bolshevist visitors. Many of them took me for an Irishman and invited me to join the Soviet they were founding for Irish Bolshevists. I let them nurse the illusion, thinking it might help me to get out of the country.

I went to several gatherings at the School for Propaganda, where a crowd of Bolshevists from all countries were being trained in the art of undermining Governments. I think most of the foreign students were more interested in learning this dangerous art than in learning the economic tenets of Bolshevism. I rather think they were little anxious to know them since they were working so badly all around. There were swarthy, smooth-skinned Hindus, black men, Chinese, Japanese, Tartars, Persians, Turks, and a host of strange folk, all diligently learning to upset Governments, or, more likely, just anxious to get Bolshevist support for their own national schemes. There were a good number of Sinn Feiners, mostly Anglo-Irishmen, hardly a genuine Celt. At these meetings I learnt it was good tactics to start with the least loyal elements in a country and work them up. Sinn Fein was to be supported not for its own sake, but as an element leading to the overthrow of Government. Sinn Feiners were to be introduced into all the British public services so that at the outbreak of disorder, the social organism might be easily crippled. Even the humble work of liftman was not to be neglected. The telephone exchanges were to be well stocked with Sinn Fein girls, and the post-offices particularly.

Military missions and public commissions were to be watched, and the appointment of Sinn Feiners secured

wherever possible. Such men might not be pro-Bolshevists, but they would be anti-Governmental and open to disloyalty, impeding the action of a Government.

The same method was recommended to Hindus and Blacks to be applied with regard to India, South Africa, and the British Colonies.

For Spain, the Catalonians were to be stirred up to demand independence ; in France, the Basques, the Bretons, and so on in all Capitalist countries. The enflaming of nationalist feeling and the overrunning of the public services with these elements were to go on simultaneously.

The remarkable thing about the pupils was their education and social position. I never saw a working man the whole time I visited the school.

One day I met there a young Ukrainian, whom I had known in Petrograd. I was surprised to find he had joined the Bolsheviks. He confided to me, however, that he had joined them merely to be of use to his friends. He had already saved several of them from being shot or turned out of their houses, besides getting food for them in abundance.

"It's the only thing!" he said, laughing. "Since I joined the Bolsheviks, I have become a sort of god in a leather jacket (commissars affected this dress). I take everything now where I used to sit and see it taken. It's great fun! And the best way out, too! It shocked my mother, but she smiles when I bring her white flour and a pair of new boots."

I was delighted to meet him. In a small café where we drank acorn coffee, I told him about my desire to quit the country. He promised to do everything, but it was a risky job. He had nothing to do with the Foreign Office.

A few days later, he sent me a note telling me to meet a certain French lady who was arranging for a train to take some Frenchwomen to the Frontier. I went to see her in great hopes, but was disappointed on being told that no

men under fifty were allowed to leave. She thought I might try my luck and board the train when it was leaving. What did it matter if the Red Guards stopped me? They could only bring me back to Moscow. But what punishment would they mete out? She could only shrug her shoulders for a reply.

I was determined not to leave a stone unturned. On the night the train left Moscow, I slipped past the barrier on to the platform and got into the train with a porter. About fifty French women entered and took their seats. The train moved off at last. It was pitch dark outside, neither moon nor stars in the sky. The train rolled slowly on and I thought I was on my way to the frontier and the company of sane people. At Klin about fifty miles north of Moscow, the train stopped. A group of Red Guards carrying lanterns boarded the lightless train and inspected the passports. Every permit had to bear the signature of George Chicherin. Unfortunately for me, I was sitting near the door. I could find no hiding-place. I was taken off the train. A few minutes later, the train steamed away. The Red Guards escorted me with a Frenchman, and his wife to their headquarters.

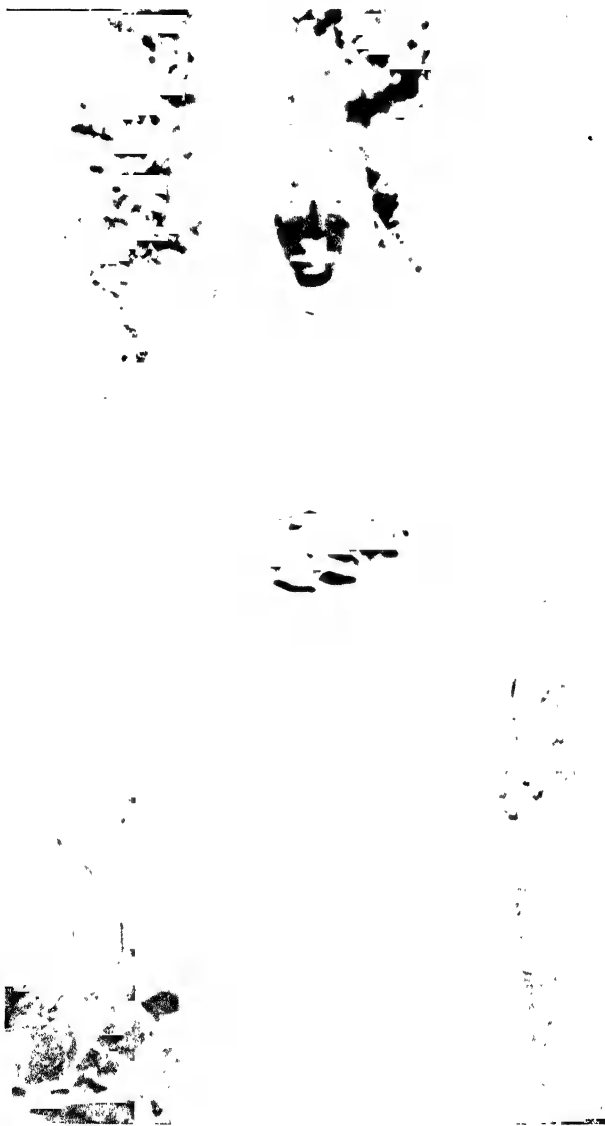
I was sent back to Moscow and released. When I met the Frenchwoman, she was not surprised to see me.

"I expected you would fail," she said. "Come to my flat and I will see what I can do. I have an idea."

With the aid of her old servant she dressed me in an old skirt, a velvet blouse and a shawl for my head. A few twists of straw here and there relieved me of a scare-crow flatness. With a deft hand, Madame patted a powder-puff over my face.

"A little paleness becomes a sick woman," she murmured approvingly. "Now look in the mirror!"

The figure that looked out of the mirror was a fearful libel on woman. Nevertheless, I promised to come and be dressed like that again in three weeks' time. I was to



THE AUTHOR IN DISGUISE.

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be known as Miss Bloom, suffering from mental debility and underfeeding.

Three weeks later a train was standing in the Nikolaevsky Station in Moscow. Midnight had already struck and rain was beating down in torrents. Frenchwomen were carrying bags and bundles along the platform and struggling into the delapidated third-class train. Here and there an English voice sounded calm and measured amid the excited French chatter. A cab drove up before the station and a tall, thin woman's figure issued and passed slowly up the steps. She appeared to be suffering and tired. Drawing her woollen shawl closer round her head, she passed under the dim station lights, looking ghastly pale.

Near the barrier, where the inevitable Red Guards stood with heavy rifles, the woman halted, searching the faces of the people beyond. Suddenly a Frenchwoman came forward, calling out to the pale woman and beckoning her to come through the barrier.

"Ah! Miss Bloom! *Vous voilà!* This way!" she said. "*Tak pozno!*" (so late) she added in Russian before the Red Guards, "You nearly missed seeing your old friends off! Are you feeling better? Poor Miss Bloom! Let me help you!"

She dashed outside past the Red Guards and seized the thin, pale woman by the arm. Together they passed back through the barrier. "You are so good to come all this way and in this weather just to say good-bye!" the Frenchwomen observed in a loud casual voice.

The Red Guards went on with their guarding, placidly self-contained.

Once inside the train, a broken-down, windowless collection of trucks, the pale Miss Bloom lay down under a seat. The talkative Frenchwoman whispered something to her compatriots in the compartment and spread the luggage along the floor, closing Miss Bloom from view.

When the train stopped at Klin and the Red Guards

mounted to inspect the passports, Miss Bloom still lay immured in her altar-tomb. The train moved on and she heaved a sigh of relief. But she could not leave her prison. There were still a few Guards moving from carriage to carriage.

The journey to the Frontier took fifteen hours. During that time Miss Bloom lay still. When the passengers in her coupé took their meals, they brushed the bits of paper and scraps under the seat. Fumbling among these Miss Bloom found some cold cutlets done up in paper. With these little god-sends she satisfied her hunger.

All the time she was wondering how she would get across the Frontier. Would the Red Guards let her cross without a passport? Would the Finns allow her to enter their territory? Desperate questions, that could only be prayed for.

Luck, however, came Miss Bloom's way. A resourceful Frenchwoman among the passengers hit on a plan. It is well known that the Red Guards were confiscating the refugees' Tsarist notes and valuables before they were allowed to pass the Frontier. Many of the Frenchwomen were governesses who were taking with them all they had managed to preserve of their savings. The resourceful woman thought it would be a good plan if every passenger, some three hundred in fact, subscribed twenty Tsarist roubles. That would make a handsome sum of 6,000 roubles.

When the time came for the inspection of the baggage and purses, the resourceful Frenchwoman would take the chief Red Guard aside and explain her difficulties.

The plan worked admirably. The Red Commandant discreetly pocketed the bundle of Tsarist notes and gave the order for the whole party to pass through without any further inspection of their luggage.

Miss Bloom, meanwhile, had faded from existence. When

the train stopped at the Frontier station and the people started to get out, she was so cramped, bone-sore, and dishevelled that her anatomy went all awry. The skirt refused to keep its place, and, furthermore, a black smudge of beard had darkened the paleness of her cheeks and chin.

In despair she whisked off the two garments and appeared in the garb of a man. Some twists of straw lay on the floor.

I was myself once again, but with little time to reflect on it. Seizing the wicker-basket of a Frenchwoman who had watched my endeavours to remain in skirts, I hoisted it on my back.

"I'm your porter!" I said to her. "I'll follow you across the Frontier."

I staggered down to a bridge that crossed a brook. Two Lettish Guards stood at the entrance. The Frenchwoman passed briskly across and I hurried behind. As soon as my feet touched Finnish soil, I felt that I had shed a nightmare from my soul. I ran up the little path to a small patch of sand by the railway-track and sank down, overcome with joy. The red-jawed monster of Bolshevism was across the brook. Its blood-stained, merciless, ferocious claws were no longer stretched out over man, woman and child. It was there, over there, past those two Red Guards. Here I was, beyond its reach at last. I dug my fingers into the soil of Finland, lifting it up and pouring it out of my palms as though it were a sacred libation. I was so joyful to be on the soil of freedom and good men.

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Count and Countess Torloff, who first invited me to Russia, are in their graves. They and their guests were all murdered by the Bolsheviks at their estate near Bielgorod in April

1918. The wonderful industries they laboured so many years to develop are now a Bolshevist "model farm and factory," to which the foreign guests of the Soviet Government are conducted with pride and favour that they may witness what the Soviet Government has "created." In the shadow of the church's speckled domes a row of graves . . .

